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# Decentering the Study of Migration Governance: A Radical View

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues in favour of a radical de-centring of our understanding of international migration governance that privileges the viewpoints of origin and transit countries, non-state actors and includes both urban and rural perspectives. Building on the contributions to this Special Issue, I propose a plural understanding of governance and elaborate on the different dimensions along which we can de-centre our understanding of the governance of international migration (and of the related political and policy discourses). The paper starts by discussing the 21<sup>st</sup> century context within which migration governance is inscribed and proposes a working definition of de-centring and pluralizing our understanding of migration governance. I then introduce the multiple ways in which we can think of this de-centring: along a geopolitical approach that gives primacy to the role that countries play in migration processes; along a spatial approach (views from the city vs views from rural areas); or with reference to the actors involved (state, civil society, private sector, migrants and their households). The paper concludes by discussing the importance of such radical de-centring for our thinking and speaking about migration.

## Introduction

Migration is one of the important transnational governance challenges of our times. While calls for inter-governmental cooperation in migration are perhaps 50 years old, in recent times there has been a true impetus for the setting up of a global governance framework for migration through the Global Compacts on both migrants and refugees and the resulting consultations. Even though international migration remains a contested topic – countries of origin and destination, migrants and their families, civil society organisations and international institutions having different views and interests – a consensus has been rising in recent years that migration is mutually beneficial (a win-win-win situation for migrants, countries of origin and countries of destination) if it is safe, regular, and orderly (Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration 2018).

The narrative of the ‘good’ regular migration has become dominant, if not hegemonic, obscuring alternative perspectives on the needs and interests of different actors involved in the governance of international migration, and different realities on the ground. The case of migrations across the Mediterranean in the past 15 years but particularly since 2015 can only but testify to this stark contrast between the dominant policy narrative for a safe regular and orderly migration and the actual reality on the ground. There are strong drivers of both economic and humanitarian migration that pushes people to defy restrictions and borders, and to move through channels that disorderly, unsafe and more often than not, irregular.

The dominant narrative of safe, orderly, and regular migration tends to unilaterally privilege the wishes and needs of receiving country governments (and employers or other stakeholders) disregarding the country of origin, country of transit and own migrant perspective (Collett and Ahad 2017; Mouthaan 2019). This is not to say that migrants or countries of origin do not wish for migration to be orderly and safe and regular (quite the contrary actually). But rather it is to say that our understanding of international migration and its governance remains predominantly Western-centric (Garces Mascarenas 2019) and focused on states and international organisations while we need to pay more attention to the role of different stakeholders and actors (Cuttitta 2020). We need to open up our perspectives and de-centre our approaches to international migration governance with a view of not only including those of origin and transit countries, but also those of a variety of stakeholders, and of different spatial contexts, both rural and urban. This is not simply about acknowledging the multi-level governance of migration but about incorporating views from the margins (Cuttitta 2020; Parker 2008).

Building on some of my past research (Triandafyllidou 2017), I propose a plural understanding of governance and elaborate on the different dimensions along which we can de-centre our analysis of international migration governance (and of the related political and policy discourses). While de-centring at first instance makes us think about geopolitics and hence speaks about countries of origin, transit and destination, this type of de-centring may also be seen as nonsensical, or at least imperfect, as an increasing number of countries are implicated in at least two of these three roles (both origin and transit, such as Niger or Mali, or both origin and destination – such as Poland) and sometimes even all three (origin, transit and destination, like, for instance Turkey or Morocco). Therefore, it is important to consider multiple perspectives of de-centring: de-centring towards different world regions, along a spatial approach (views from the city vs views from rural areas), and with reference to a multitude of governance actors (state, civil society, private sector, migrants and their households).

The next section of this paper starts by discussing the 21<sup>st</sup> century context within which migration governance is inscribed and proposes a working definition of de-centring and pluralizing our understanding of migration

governance. I then introduce the multiple ways in which we can think of de-centring our analysis of migration governance building on the examples of this Special Issue with a view to adopting a radical de-centring perspective.

### **Putting Migration Governance in Context**

The term migration governance goes beyond government to designate the interaction and networking between public and private actors, both in horizontal (non-hierarchical) and vertical (hierarchical) ways in the governing of migration flows and migrant integration processes. It recognizes that relevant actors include not only national authorities but also civil society, employers, trade unions, various intermediaries like travel or employment agencies, education institutions and formal and informal networks. Migration governance activity typically occurs at the national (and local to some extent) level as regulating borders and controlling who belongs to the nation-state and who does not is a quintessential aspect of the nation-state system and of national sovereignty (Scholten and Penninx 2016). However, the national and transnational level is closely intertwined, even interdigitated as what occurs at one level affects the other and several of the non-state actors involved may operate transnationally (see also Panizzon and van Riemsdijk 2019). This includes legal actors like education institutions, travel agencies, employment agencies, non-governmental organisations, as well as illegal actors like migrant smuggling networks, those who forge or sell identity documents, and of course criminals like human traffickers.

The current hegemonic discourse about regular, predictable, safe, orderly migration involves both state actors (notably, countries of origin, destination and transit, and their different ministries and services involved in the governance of migration flows) and transnational stakeholders and networks of governance such as international organisations (IOs), like the IOM, ILO or the UNHCR; large transnational NGOs like Caritas, or Doctors without Borders, Oxfam or Terre des Hommes; inter-governmental forums like the Global Forum on Migration and Development; expert networks like the Global Migration Policy Associates or the Global Detention Project, or companies like Western Union, large phone and internet providers, or the not-for-profit World Education Services, only to state a few examples (Betts 2010; Geiger and Pecoud 2010, 2014). We are also increasingly witnessing ways in which transregional institutional cooperation shapes intraregional cooperation and governance (Bisong 2019).

State-led and IO-led migration governance discourses are often imbued by an apparent value neutrality. As if migration governance is about efficiency, predictability and security and tends often to overlook the different role, interests, values as well as capacity to act of the different types of stakeholders. Indeed civil society, employers, expert networks or international organisations

are both empowered and constrained by their sectorial frameworks. Their actions and aims are informed by specific institutional and organizational cultures and value constellations. As Stefania Panebianco in this special issue shows in the case study of Siracusa local community practices by a myriad of local stakeholders can shape migration governance from below. The same is true for Europe's peripheries, the Moroccan cities who also grapple with their national authorities and struggle for the local inclusion of migrants, going against the tide of European border externalization and securitization (see Kutz and Wolff in this volume). And we should not forget the role of international organisations in propagating discourses about irregularity and deterrence to legitimize a restrictive migration governance (see Freemantle and Landau in this special issue).

Beyond though the different interests, narratives and action domains of the multiple actors implicated in migration governance at local, national and transnational levels, we must not lose from sight the wider socio-economic and political context within which current flows and past or future 'crises' are embedded. We need to make sense of migration governance in relation to different periods and phases of migration in the European continent and more globally so as to highlight the links between migration flows and wider social, economic, political and cultural trends (see also Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014, chapter 1). Oftentimes our discussion of migration governance evolves around specific migration 'crises' like the refugee emergency of 2015–2016, the Syrian conflict or the protracted Venezuelan crisis but misses the larger context.

The migration flows across the Mediterranean from south and east to north and west need to be analysed within the post-1989, end of Cold War context. Indeed, it has already been 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The implosion of Communism signalled the start of new massive migration flows within Europe, mostly from East to West and South during the 1990s and early 2000s. Capitalism and a free market liberal democracy were greeted by political elites in both western and eastern Europe as the good political and economic system. From then on it was believed, human history would be a linear path without any significant ideological conflicts as Francis Fukuyama argued (1989, 2006). While Fukuyama did not necessarily mean that people were happier or better off thanks to historical 'progress', he argued that history as a coherent intelligible process had come to an end and liberal democracy had affirmed itself as the form of government. Even though several international crises marked the 1990s (the first Gulf War, the break-up of Yugoslavia, the bankruptcy of Argentina, the Oslo Agreements, the Kosovo war), it was 9/11 and the re-emergence of international terrorism that started shaking the grounds of this vision that ideological conflict had ended. Even though the global order was no longer about two opposed poles of power, history had not come to an end but it was actually (re-)started and with it several conflicts in

different world regions as well as mixed migration flows of people seeking both protection and a better future.

Along with international terrorism though, there were two concomitant processes which took place peacefully and discreetly albeit had important repercussions for global governance in general but also for migration governance in particular. The first was the rise of new global economic powers, such as China, India and Brazil as world level economic powerhouses, which remained emigration countries but became at the same time migration destinations. The second and closely related phenomenon was different types of regional integration processes that developed or further reaffirmed themselves in various areas of the world like Latin America, Africa and Asia, alongside of course deeper economic if not political integration in Europe which led to the development also of enhanced regional mobility regimes within the European Union, but also within MERCOSUR in South America, the ECOWAS in West Africa, and to a lesser extent within ASEAN in southeast Asia (Triandafyllidou et al. 2019).

In addition, the last decade has seen the emergence of transnational social and political grassroots movements including the mobilization around the 2011 Arab spring, the Indignados movements across Europe and elsewhere in the years following the global economic crisis of 2008–2009, the rise of the climate change youth mobilization (the Fridays for the Future).

While concerns with global challenges such as environmental protection or world peace date back to the 1970s, they have acquired a new, more markedly transnational character and a new form of ‘simultaneity’ – through the new possibilities that they could avail via the social media. Migrants and refugees could be seen to navigate the Balkan route with their smartphones, citizen journalists have documented both the Arab spring and the *indignados* or *gilet jaunes* protests, and Greta Thunberg could greet her supporters from the train that brought her from Stockholm to London.

These three new elements that characterize the last 30 years, notably the emergence of new powers; the emergence/formation of a global civil society; and the increasing regional integration in different parts of the world have created a new environment for migration governance too. Migration governance has to be understood within this volatile, multi-lateral context and needs to be related to the wider dynamics of an increasingly interconnected international environment. Understanding migration governance within the contemporary context requires zooming away from the narrower national and ‘western’, destination country perspective, adopting a de-centred and culturally informed approach.

The notion of de-centring follows on from where the concept of ‘worlding’ has left. Worlding (see also Nora El Qadim in this volume) is a term that has been coined initially by critical feminist theories (Spivak Gayatri 1985) which stresses the fact that a situation in which we live is neither homogenized and global nor separate and local but situated at a specific place and at the same

time immersed in transnational networks (Wilson 2007; Wilson and Connery 2007). ‘Worlding’ has been used in feminist studies to point out that critical gender approaches need to acknowledge that the experiences and issues of women (and men) in the Global South are different from those in the world’s West and North. The concept is inscribed in the post-colonial critical perspective and proposes a critical deconstruction of global governance discourses today.

Such a critical and de-centred approach follows on from relevant studies in international relations (Tickner and Blaney 2012) and global governance (Triandafyllidou 2017). It emphasizes the parochialism of western-dominated scholarship but also to the importance of engaging with such “different” perspectives critically. Thus, for what concerns migration governance, the viewpoints of destination, and transit or origin countries are mutually constitutive. They need to acknowledge each other and include each other’s views.

### **De-centring Migration Governance**

The very notion of de-centring migration governance is based on the idea that there exists a ‘centre’ and a ‘periphery’ or several peripheries and that we need to look for the alternative views of migration and its governance from those peripheral or marginal perspectives (Parker 2008). The notion of the ‘centre’ is of course a metaphor to emphasise the asymmetric power relations that characterize migration governance (see also Zardo and Wolff in the introduction to this special issue) including in our analysis neglected actors and variables. However, the de-centring needs to keep its critical perspective in three ways. It needs to acknowledge that the different actors and views, those ‘central’ and those ‘peripheral’, those of destination and origin countries, those of state and non-state actors, those national and those transnational are mutually constituted. There has to be no single dominant viewpoint, and every thesis is constituted also by its antithesis. Secondly, analysing migration governance from a de-centred perspective requires an interdisciplinary lens, what Nayak and Selbin have termed with reference to international relations: “other places to start” (Nayak and Selbin 2010, 9 cit. in Tickner and Blaney 2012, 9). Third, a de-centred approach to migration governance needs to engage with the institutions and structures where knowledge on migration and migration governance is produced, incorporating the views of scholars from different world regions critically so that the end product is both multi-disciplinary and polyphonic (see also Tickner and Blaney 2012 on international relations’ knowledge). Nora El Qadim in this special issue also particularly emphasizes the need to bring not only the different disciplinary perspectives together but also the study of migration and migrants. In other words, the need not to compartmentalize our analysis of migration



governance as if the study and management of flows can be separated from the study of migrant integration or of migrant trajectories at destination.

El Qadim (in this special issue) points to two disconnects that are relevant for de-centring our understanding of migration governance, notably the disconnect between migration and migration integration, and that between studies on the global South and the global North. She thus argues for acknowledging and critically engaging with regional and disciplinary boundaries and seeking to undo power asymmetries that are reflected also in the production and distribution of relevant scientific knowledge.

Following from both this specific analysis of El Qadim and from the very introduction to this special issue by Federica Zardo and Sarah Wollf, I would like to argue here for the need of de-centring or pluralizing our very de-centring approach. I would like to invite us to think of de-centring not as a flat circle, but as a tri-dimensional one where the centre and its peripheries can be imagined and explored along different dimensions. We might actually if possible think of more than three dimensions. Here I have identified three main dimensions of de-centring our understanding and our knowledge production on migration governance.

Thus, we need to engage with de-centring towards different world regions along a geopolitical approach that gives primacy to the role that countries play in migration processes; along a spatial approach (views from the city vs views from rural areas); with reference to the actors involved (state, civil society, private sector, migrants and their households), as well as cultural de-centring, acknowledging the different views of migration in different world regions.

### ***Decentred Perspectives: origin, Transit and Destination***

The first and most obvious way of engaging with a critical approach towards migration governance is that of incorporating the view not only of the destination countries that dominate both inter-governmental forums like the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) but also international organisations dealing with migration like the IOM. However this form of de-centring stumbles into the complexity of migration processes and their multi-directional and volatile nature. Most countries in the world today are both origin and destination countries.

While net migration gives an indication on the direction of the flows, migration statistics often indicate only inflows, or only net migration, neglecting to discuss the size and direction of outflows. An obvious example here would be the UK where net migration has been positive during the last 20 years, but where pointing to net migration at approximately 200,000 or 300,000 entries per year obscures that there were nearly 600,000 entries in total but 300,000 or more departures over each calendar year (Migration Observatory 2019). Thus what defines the role of each country is not only



the numbers but its role in the migration process as predominantly an origin or destination country and in the case of the UK for instance there is no doubt that its geopolitical role in international migration governance is as a migrant-receiving society.

Another example of this ambiguity is the case of southern European countries like Italy which not only have been converted from emigration to immigration countries since the 1990s in a rather abrupt and massive change, but also keep experiencing immigration flows from both EU and non-EU countries (e.g. Romania, but also Ecuador, Colombia, the Ukraine, Morocco or Nigeria), but at the same time experience important emigration flows of their own nationals (Colombo and Dalla-Zuanna 2019).

In addition, countries that experience important immigration, transit and emigration may be implicated in different migration systems and such flows may involve different groups of migrants. This is the case of Turkey which has been for long an important country of origin of flows towards various western European countries like Germany, France or the Netherlands, but at the same time has become an important migrant and asylum seeker destination in the last ten years as it hosts the world's largest asylum seeker population, notably over 3.5 million of Syrians. Turkey is also an important transit country as many of the migrants and refugees that cross Turkey aim to continue on their path to Greece and other European countries. Sarah Leonard and Christian Kaunert in this special issue discuss how Turkey seeks to overturn the dynamics of immigration governance by blackmailing the European Union, threatening to overturn the EU Turkey statement, contributing thus to constructing asylum seekers as a threat. While the politics of extortion (as Leonard and Kaunert call them) have not eventually worked out, the role of a transit country reminds us of the need to adopt multiple perspectives.

Portugal is also an interesting example here as the country has never ceased to be involved in multi-directional migration networks with other luso-speaking countries in Africa and Latin America, notably Brazil or Angola, while flows of Portuguese emigration to the UK, France and other western and northern European countries have never completely stopped (Pereira and Azevedo 2019).

A closer look to western African countries like Senegal, Ghana or Nigeria, that are considered in Europe as important countries of origin, shows that they have been and still are implicated in complex flows of mobility within the wider West African region and towards Europe (Maher 2017; Omobowale et al. 2019) that defy their unambiguous classification as countries of origin.

Thus, de-centring our understanding and analysis of migration governance in relation to the role of each country as mainly a pole of origin, transit or destination stumbles into these complex and ambiguous realities of migration on the ground. The fact is that the designation of each country as origin or destination has as much to do with global power asymmetries and transnational governance networks as it has with actual migration flows. De-centring

therefore our understanding of migration governance requires a critical engagement with how migration governance is analysed and assessed: who sets the primary objectives, who sets the criteria for assessing whether specific policies are ‘successful’ or not and how the interests of different countries are reflected in ‘migration partnerships’ and other agreements that aim to regulate migration flows. This is an important argument also raised in this special issue by Iriann Freemantle and Loren Landau in which they consider the European narratives on African immigration which the authors define as a trap. African (prospective) emigrants are discouraged, deterred, asked to stay put, to remain confined within Africa and their efforts to seek a better future in Europe is constructed as illegal, unsafe, immoral and ultimately irresponsible. Freemantle and Landau convincingly show how the dominant – the ‘central’ – migration governance narratives are unilaterally constructed without incorporating or addressing the perspectives, interests or aspirations of migrants from the African continent.

However, on a more positive note, there is growing research (Akanle 2018; Mouthaan 2019; Nakache, Pellerin, and Veronis 2015; Omobowale et al. 2019) in this field that seeks to do precisely that, to help us appreciate the interests and perspectives of political elites and of citizens in the countries of origin, the complexities of the governance field in these countries, too, stirring away from seeing these countries as unitary, homogenous and subordinated actors. This is naturally a field of studies on migration governance that needs a lot more work and a lot more engagement in both the academic and policy field.

### ***De-centred Locations***

A second dimension for de-centring our understanding of migration is one that reflects the growing literature on multi-level governance (Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018; Caponio, Scholten, and Zapata-Barrero 2019; Scholten 2015) and the role of local actors in migration governance. The importance of cities both as local integration actors and as the main locations where diversity is negotiated (Wessendorf 2014) has been now well established. However, this strand of research has predominantly focused on migrant integration rather than on the role of cities and the local level for the governance of flows. Several contributions to this special issue however highlight how local actors, beyond even local authorities, including non-governmental organisations and citizen initiatives get actively involved in dealing particularly with irregular migration flows, addressing governance gaps or inertia (as Panebianco shows in her case study of Siracusa, in Sicily) or mobilizing local authorities and influencing the national level as Kutz and Wolff demonstrate in their paper on Tangiers in Morocco.

De-centring our understanding of migration governance however requires also a further effort to look at the rural locations where migration takes place and where it can have an increasingly important role for local production and both the local and national economy, as happens for instance in the role of seasonal farmworkers (Corrado et al. 2018). Particularly in the Mediterranean context the interplay between rural development, cross-Mediterranean migrations and related migration and agricultural policies is an important perspective that needs to be 're-centred' (Nori and Triandafyllidou 2019).

Migration governance discourses and policies in the Mediterranean have focused almost uniquely on irregular crossings and notions of emergency and crisis and have overlooked the importance of rural to rural migrations for the livelihoods and survival not only of migrants but of the agri-food sector and industry in southern Europe (Nori and Farinella 2020).

Thus, the spatial decentering of our analysis of migration governance requires not just the recognition of cities as special migration 'places' but also of the countryside and rural areas. What we need here is a multi-dimensional perspective that recognizes the complex interaction of rural to rural as well as urban to urban or rural to urban international migrations.

### ***De-centred Actors' Perspectives***

I have already argued in the previous section that a de-centred and critical approach towards migration governance starts from acknowledging and analysing the role of different actors involved and most specifically that of non-state actors that can be local, national or transnational. Non-state actors involved in migration governance have also been labelled as the 'migration industry' pointing to the multitude of private, non-profit, semi-public actors and the formal and informal networks that are involved in it (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sorensen 2013). There is a long list of intermediaries and stakeholders that include employment agencies, post-secondary education institutions, language schools, lawyers, and marriage brokers, travel agencies and transport or money transfer companies, along with employers, migrant support organisations, international organisations, and even co-ethnic and kinship networks which have been considered in the study of migration governance. What however is perhaps lacking in this area of studies is a closer analysis of how such actors disrupt dominant narratives and views of the migration process.

In this respect I would like to highlight here two specific perspectives, one that focuses on gendered dimension in particular as one of the perspectives that needs to be pluralized, and the second that looks at the role of migrant smugglers inviting us to think of them not as criminals but as one among many agents in a wider migration governance network.

The gendered dimension is eloquently developed in this special issue in the contribution of Pina Bilgin on the narrative of ‘women’s security’ and how it has played out in governance discourses and policies on the refugee emergency across the Mediterranean in the 2015–2016 period. Bilgin explores how migrant and refugee women (and men) are constructed as backwards and not yet enlightened by the dominant European views on gender equality. Through the analysis of the writings of Moroccan sociologist Fatema Mernissi, Bilgin shows the pivotal role that gender plays in constructing the migrants as alien to Europe and in attributing the responsibility for this backwardness to the Arab world and to Islam while disregarding the role of civil society actors in the same countries. In a similar vein, Luiza Bialasiewicz in this Special Issue analyses critically the exclusionary European ‘femonationalism’ developed at the wake of the 2015 refugee emergency, starting off with the events in Cologne and developing into a full-fledged discourse about protecting European women from dangerous refugee or migrant (Muslim) men. The importance of de-centring our analysis of the role of gender in migration governance narratives and even policies cannot be overstated (Hennebry and Petrozziello 2019). Similar examples of symbolic governance within can be found in the banning of the full-face veil in several European countries during the last decade (in France in 2010, in Belgium in 2011 or in Denmark in 2018) – even if the women that wore such veils were a tiny minority. Gender inequality in the Arab world and more broadly in Muslim majority countries is one of the dimensions commonly used to undermine the validity of civil society actors in these countries and to construct cultural hierarchies between ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ societies. Research on the governance of international migration needs to engage more with the perspectives of civil society organisations that focus on gender issues and with women intellectuals or activists and politicians from different world regions.

A second dimension that is worth considering in the effort to de-centre our approach towards different actors in migration governance concerns the role of migrant smugglers. In a recent special issue Sheldon Zhang, Gabriella Sanchez and Luigi Achilli (2018) argue for an alternative perspective on migrant smuggling looking at relationships of dependency but also of trust that develop among smugglers and their migrant customers (Achilli 2018), the community aspect of smuggling in places like Somalia or Afghanistan (Majidi 2018). Julien Brachet (2018) perhaps provocatively but not less accurately shows how EU policies of border externalization in the Sahel have turned the petty smuggling business into a violent criminal industry exacerbating the risks for migrants. It may seem as iconoclastic to incorporate smugglers into our de-centred migration governance perspectives but as I argue elsewhere (Triandafyllidou 2018, 2019–220) there are at least four important ways in which those perspectives can inform migration governance. My analysis shows

that tightening borders and disrupting local migrant facilitation economies have important implications, albeit in the opposite direction than the one desired. Instead of discouraging migrants and dismantling smuggling networks, these policies lead to migrants investing more money and facing more risks along their journeys, as the networks become true criminal industries. Border controls and the fight against migrant smuggling need to take into account wider regional political and economic processes and the role of the smuggling business as a mode of subsistence for local groups in some of the transit regions. At the same time there is a need to acknowledge how border externalization creates employment for international experts located in those regional EU or IOM offices while it does not help in addressing the main socio-economic or political drivers of emigration and transit migration from those regions.

In short, de-centring our perspective on migration governance to include non-state actors needs to adopt a radical critical perspective drawing into question both our dominant cultural understandings for issues such as for instance gender equality but also our dominant views about legality and irregularity and what are legitimate actors' perspectives that need to be included in our analysis of migration governance.

### **Connecting the De-centred Perspectives: the Way Forward**

In this paper I have argued that we need to both put migration governance into its wider socio-economic and political context, and that we need to adopt a multi-dimensional de-centring perspective that acknowledges that there are multiple 'centres' and multiple 'peripheries' from which to reconsider migration governance policies and discourses. As migration has grown more fragmented and complex so must our analysis of its governance follow suit.

The most obvious dimension of de-centring notably that of integrating the perspectives of origin and transit countries to challenge the dominant views of destination countries stumbles into the fact that all countries today are implicated into human migration often as both origin and receiving states and sometimes also as places of transit. I have argued therefore for the need of nuancing and interrogating our understanding of different country perspectives on migration governance. It is perhaps time to do away with rigid classifications of origin and host countries and rather consider how each country is positioned in a complex web of migration relationships that can develop in different directions and that also evolve in time and are intertwined with other policy areas such as trade, global value chains but also security and geopolitics.

While the world is becoming increasingly urban, a decentred perspective needs also to include a multi-level approach that acknowledges the importance

of cities and local actors, including civil society and the private sector, in migration governance, without neglecting the transnational level. At the same time we need to pay attention to what happens in rural areas and the relevant actors in those as international migration plays an important part in those areas both as an exodus of a young population but also as a way of mitigating demographic decline. This parallel and combined interest in both urban and rural locations and their transnational connections acknowledges the multi-scalar complexity of migration and its governance (Glick Schiller 2015).

A radical and complex decentering of migration governance analysis requires also to include non-legitimate, indeed illegal stakeholders such as migrant smuggling networks in our analysis, and by going out of our cultural comfort zone to consider alternative value frameworks.

In conclusion, this analysis also shows that beyond doing migration governance it is important how we talk about migration and migration governance and whose 'stories' we listen to. De-centring migration governance analysis will not overturn socio-economic inequality or global power asymmetries but it has an important role in changing the way in which we think and talk about migration by incorporating alternative views of a plurality of actors. This is all the more important as an institutional framework for the global governance of migration is emerging, even if with some difficulty and hesitation, through the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018). While the first International migration Review Forum will meet for the first time in 2022, it is perhaps high time to rethink our migration research agenda towards a de-centred perspective.

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