

Margit Fauser is a Senior Lecturer at Bielefeld University Faculty of Sociology . She works on International Migration, Multiculturalism, and Transnationalism. Yasemin Yıldız made an interview with Margit on the current trends in migration and its “transnational” aspects.

Although transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, the concept & its theory are newly emerging and keeping on developing. In this regard, what do you think about the future of theoretical & international development of transnationalism?

Let me first stress how transnational studies or a transnational perspective in migration research emerged in the 1990s which is, as you said, not so long ago. For migration research the term was new in the sense that people were now looking into cross-border relations, even when these historically have always been there. As you said, it is not a new phenomenon, although with globalization it became quantitatively and qualitatively much more diverse and visible. From that moment in 1990s, this focus on cross-border relations, continued ties, identities, and social networks was meant to challenge both the idea of assimilation, meaning that people would go from one place to another and at some point cut all their ties and entirely assimilate into that one, new place.

At the same time, it was also related to world systems theory arguments that placed migration within the larger networks and global flows, and here especially as a counter movement to economic globalization, power asymmetries and economic inequalities on a global scale. These two perspectives are also what I am interested in in my own

research and why I think this is a relevant contribution to migration research both for the social changes going on in immigration and also in emigration societies; and because it places migration within a global perspective.

This is also what we will see in the future debates,. I think there is an emerging acknowledgement that many people do have transnational connections; so for example in the sociology of Europeanisation, research shows us that many people across Europe, whether they migrated or not, have cross-border contacts.

Also in other fields we see now transnational approaches more prominently, for example in social movement research, or in relation to labor markets it is becoming more prominent. Within the European space, for example, we are now looking into the may diverse movements that people are undertaking in order to find a job across Europe while they maintain their family ties and also often their entire household "back home".

In Europe, we have the legal category of posted workers, so these people are being employed in their country of origin, and then they are posted, in our case, to Germany. This is now where we are speaking about transnational labor mobility; because these workers are highly mobile, connected through family life and work to places in two or more countries and face very different legal and social conditions in these countries. I think all those phenomena show that transnational migration is becoming more prominent on the agenda of globalization researches more generally.

What do you think about transnational migrants' socio-cultural contribution to the country in which they live?

I think we first have to make a distinction between socio-cultural elements that migrants bring with them and the transnational dimensions this may have. Analytically these are two different things. Very classically, cultural pluralism has the idea that people come to a different place; they bring cultural traditions, knowledges, assets, and practices with them that they contribute to the immigration society. From a transnational perspective, we also see that this may have a dimension that connects them to the country of origin. Music podcasts, films or literature connects them to their country of origin or other places. That's also not exclusively related with where one comes from. In addition, cultural practices and identities generally transform across time and space. When it comes to the contributions, I think it is one further element of cultural diversity that we can generally see through many different influences. Socio-cultural practices, events, festivals, but also daily practices are the elements in this whole fabric of different cultures, or cultural elements. I think this is influencing not only the country of immigration but also the country of emigration. Transnational ties are never unilateral or never one-directional. They are always both ways. And this is something that connects people even though they have never met.

What about the bilateral relations of their country of origin and the country migrants live in? How would they affect that?

Let's say there is a demonstration in favor of either Erdogan or the Kurdish Question in Turkey. It affects local society but also it affects high politics of course.. On the one side it raises awareness to issues that other people may not have been aware of, whether they agree or not, but at least they can see that this is an issue for some people who are living here. Of course transnational issues can also contribute to conflict and tension, whether among migrants and other resident populations or among migrant groups.. It can also affect high politics in a way that German politicians or government feels need to interfere or if they don't they may see their foreign relations being influenced or being criticized how they are going about certain things. For example, many countries in the world include their absent citizens in their elections or they allow them to vote from abroad. This also means that these countries have to organize an election abroad. For the most parts, this is not a problem. Many immigration countries offer spaces or facilitate distribution of information. So this is often not a major problem. But sometimes it is. For example, last week (*November 4th, 2017*) we had Kurdish demonstration in Germany. The German Government has always being criticized for not interfering when people are showing Öcalan's flags. This has been long and often been an issue and attracted repeated protest from the Turkey's government. Following from the new courses announced earlier this year we saw that the police did intervene last week. Many experts see this in the context of the increasing pressure and tensions between the two countries including that so many German citizens are in Turkish prisons and the government definitely wants so advance on that issue.

As we know, you are also working on the concept of citizenship. In the last election of Germany, Erdogan ask/told the Turkish people in Germany to not to vote for certain parties. Considering this in the citizenship context, what do you think about Turkish people's positionality or responses in such situations?

I think German citizens of Turkish background or who originally came from Turkey with Turkish citizenship, they are intelligent enough, as every other citizen, to decide whom they are going to vote for. We know that the electoral preferences of migrants are very diverse. I don't think that Erdoğan will convince those undecided to do certain things or to convince those who were not already close to him and his position. I don't think people change their mind because of that. I think those who follow such a suggestion already were sort of ready to act on behalf of such positions.

Currently, we see many people of Turkish origin who are quite in favor of AKP policies. We also see many protests against but a many seem pretty much in favor. I don't know how many of those who are in favor are German citizens, so it is hard to predict the effect of this. Some of them may have been skeptical about taking up German citizenship in the first place, because it may require them to give up Turkish citizenship. I think this act of Erdoğan's mainly shows that he tries to get a hold on Turkish populations that live somewhere else, outside Turkey. He tries to expand his influence. So in terms of foreign policy, it is interesting; but in terms of national policy, for Germany, I don't think that it has much of an effect.

We know that Germany is a center for migrants in

Europe. In the case of Turkish migrants, at first Turkish migrants were regarded as “guest workers”, and they were still known as “guests” although they have lived in Germany for decades. At one point, it was accepted that they are not “guests” anymore, and that they are permanent. Comparing this, what do you think about the recent migration flow of Syrian refugees to Germany? Do you think that they will be temporary or permanent?

At the very beginning it was quite a shared assumption that labor recruitment, later on the term became guest worker migration, was temporary. All parts had same idea: the German government; Turkish state; the migrants. Also, German society at large considered it as temporary. At some point, at least 70% of all migrants returned, not only the Turkish but overall. On the other hand, of course many stayed; second and third generation emerged. Many do have transnational ties. Many of those who came are now retired and shuttle between the two countries, , they have children in Germany, they have relatives in Turkey, so again we see a changing pattern in spatial behaviors. . And we continue to have immigration, including people who are recently coming from Turkey. And also we have high numbers of emigration from Germany to Turkey. So it is a very dynamic situation that includes settled population but also diverse forms of mobilities. This was conceptualized very differently as it turned out now. I think this tells us that social change is contingent and we should be very cautious to make prognosis about the future.

Looking at the Syrians in Germany now, they came in a short time in large numbers. I think many of the Syrians also will stay for different reasons. It also depends on how

and how long the war will go on. The longer the situation remains like this, the more people will become settled, have their children in school, get married, and make connections with other people. But I am sure a certain percentage, perhaps even the majority, may also want to return. On the other hand, of course it depends on the legal regulations. Now many only have a temporary status. Even if they are granted asylum, it can be revised.

Considering that the government is now even deporting people to Iraq and Afghanistan, countries that are still unstable and insecure – and one may be surprised considering all the human rights regulations and legal provisions that we have that this is possible. Therefore it is hard to say what will happen to Syrians. It is possible that they may start being deported at some point, and there are already debates about it. We have seen similar developments with other migrant groups that were granted temporary protection in Germany, for example during the Yugoslavian War. Either they were encouraged or quite literally expelled. Also many of them stayed, thanks to their social networks, their social relations and jobs. But we don't know what will happen.

Lastly, considering the current refugee flows, local's responses to that and political parties' stands, how would be like the German migration policy in near future?

I think very generally the immigration policy, including asylum and refugee policies, will become more restrictive.. It looked relatively open and liberal for a short time and

many people were very responsive, but very obviously that was a short moment and it was also a very particular moment, because it was directed to refugees who were conceptualized a group of people in particular need of protection and support. I think it triggered a lot of empathy. On the long-run it seems that especially those who were not so welcoming from very beginning, but even some of those who were are now becoming more skeptical. We now see that not all Syrians are highly qualified, that they may have difficulties to find a job and earn a living to support their families, so on that side people have become skeptical. And then of course we have an extreme right wing xenophobic anti-Islamic movement that obviously attracts lots of attention and support. We have seen this in the electoral campaign already. Even the established parties tried to pick up arguments to portray themselves as being or becoming more restrictive, or not allowing certain behaviors who are not in accordance with western standards etcetera. There is an important debate around irregular migration, to become more restrictive here too, and to have more border controls, also within the country and so on. So even if there will be a quota for highly qualified professionals in the near future, which is also not yet clear, on many other fronts closure and control is more likely, concerning asylum, border crossings, deportations, language requirements and so on.