Migration Regime

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In everyday speech, the term "regime" is often used in a pejorative sense and is associated with repressive forms of government. However, in less marked uses and in accordance with its etymology (Fr. *régime* from Lat. *regimen*, government), the term "regime" is connected to the concepts of government and rule in general, but also more broadly to the system of rules, regulations, measures (e.g. study regime), and also to ways of life (e.g. work regime, diet regime), all of which are meanings that are more or less present in the otherwise heterogeneous usage of this term in social sciences and humanities during the 20th century. In the decades of its extensive, but only extraordinarily carefully elaborated use in various disciplines and traditions, different semantic fields and levels were associated with this term, from the externalist macro-level in political science research of international relations, through the internalist meso-level of research and development of migration and other politics, to the critical-theory micro-level and ethnographic research of migration practices, values or perceptions (Rass and Wolff 2018; cf. Cvajner Echeverría and Sciortino 2018: 68-69).

The term or conceptual field "migration regime", as summarized by Christoph Rass and Frank Wolff (2018: 25), came into use at the end of the 1960s in the natural sciences, primarily biology and physics, where it was used to denote the "migratory habits" of animals and the changing patterns of particle movements. In the meaning of patterns of movement, it also took hold in geography, where it was soon displaced by the term "system". When the bloc-division of the world collapsed and migration started being viewed as a complex, multi-layered social phenomenon that cannot be understood in terms of push and pull factors, the term "migration regime" became commonplace in various disciplines, from sociology and political science, to anthropology, in which, however, it often circulated without additional clarifications and without engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue (Rass and Wolff 2018: 42).

Divergent meanings and genealogies of the concept of regime can also be observed within the same branches of migration research. For instance, some critical researchers introduced the term "regime" in critical migration studies, while referring to critical theory and the works of Michel Foucault (e.g. Hess and Kasparek 2017: 60), while some refer to the works of Klaus Dieter Wolf and the regime theory developed in the research of international relations (e.g., Tsianos and Karakayali 2010: 375). Today, within the same perspective, parallel references are made to different regimes, ranging from border regimes (Hess and Kasparek 2017) and deportation regimes (e.g., De Genova and Peutz 2010) to search and rescue regimes (e.g., Andersson 2014), whereby the term regime is most often used in its singular form, as a signifier of broader social formations that encompass larger spatial and temporal sections.

Moving on from the dissimilarity between the different origins and uses of the term, the term migration regime in critical migration studies signals a decentralized understanding of power, plurality of actors and practices, and a focus on understanding the complexity and heterogeneity of migration (cf. Cvajner, Echeverría and Sciortino 2018). Combining this understanding of the term with the principles of the (relative) **autonomy of migration** (e.g., Moulier-Boutang and Garson 1984), the approaches in question tend to include the perspective of migration, but also an explicit critique of repressive migration processes and practices (cf., e.g., Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008). In the context of critical migration research, the migration regime is therefore not understood as an organized system related to the actions of the state, powerful individuals or groups, but as an assemblage of complex, changing and heterogeneous practices and discourses of different "actors whose practices relate to each other but are not ordered in the form of a central logic or rationality" (Tsianos, Hess and Karakayali 2009: 2). In other words, in such a situation, the actors and practices of migration control enter into different relationships with the actors and practices of those who try to evade this control, and the same can be said for the actors and practices focused on the construction of borders in relation to those who contribute to the disintegration of those borders through their actions. Border police officers, humanitarian workers, migrants, smugglers, refugees, drivers, activists, journalists, academics and others are not only elements of the regime, but are its actors, shaping it through multi-level heterogeneous interactions and constant negotiations (conflicts, acceptances, adaptations, reversals, etc.), as particularly plainly illustrated by the events related to the 2015 "crisis". Then, in reaction to the mass transcontinental migrant movement immune to the "standard" methods of border control at that time, a temporary humanitarian transit was established along the Balkans and the countries of the former Yugoslavia, a corridor that enabled hundreds of thousands of people to travel relatively quickly and safely to the center of Europe. The **Balkan corridor** was not, as is often presented, just a humanitarian formation dedicated to the facilitation of migration. Its important function, in accordance with

the two-fold humanitarian-security orientation of modern migration management, was also isolation, discipline, atomization, and ultimately reduction of movement. Movement along the corridor was halted when almost complete and coordinated control over the people in the corridor was established from Macedonia to Slovenia, not when there was no longer any humanitarian need for it (Hameršak and Pleše 2017). In March 2016, on the day the borders along the corridor were closed, around 12,000 people from so-called third countries were located in front of the closed border fence in Idomeni, Greece. Struggling in harsh living conditions at the border, these people spent weeks waiting for the opening of the borders that remain closed to them to this day.

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