

UNU-GCM & IEMed joint workshop on
Perceptions of migration in the Mediterranean

29th of November 2016, 4 pm

IEMed, Girona 20 · 08010 Barcelona, sala del Consell

At a time of unceasing “crises” connected to migrants or refugees flows both in national, European and international political debates and in the media, there is a need to carefully consider causes and effects of mobility and to reflect on a crucially related issue that will be the main focus of this workshop: perceptions of migration and their policy implications. This workshop, jointly organized by the Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility of the United Nations University (UNU-GCM) and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), aims to contribute to analyzing and understanding both socio-political and visual mechanisms underpinning perceptions of migration and mobility in the Mediterranean.

Welcome: Senén Florensa (IEMed-Executive President) and Parvati Nair (UNU-GCM-Director)

Moderator: Megha Amrith (UNU-GCM)

Xavier Aragall (IEMed): “Perception of refugee and migration flows and policies in the Mediterranean: preliminary results of the 7th Euromed Survey”.

Valeria Bello (UNU-GCM): “Root causes of prejudice: perception of migrants as security threats and the socially-constructed nexus *migration-crisis-crime*”.

Lorenzo Gabrielli (visiting researcher at IEMed; GRITIM-UPF): “Off Camera. How photographic representation of Melilla’s border are framing perceptions on mobility: a gender focus”

Parvati Nair (UNU-GCM): “The Razor’s Edge: Image and Corporeality at Europe’s Borders”

Q&A

Due to limited seating, please confirm your attendance before 25th of November at: xaragall@iemed.org

“Perception of refugee and migration flows and policies in the Mediterranean: preliminary results of the 7th Euromed Survey”, Xavier Aragall

Over the last six years, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) has carried out six editions of the Survey of actors and experts on the Euro-Mediterranean relations (Euromed Survey) with the objective of assessing the progress, achievements and shortcomings of Euro-Mediterranean relations. This year, the seventh edition was dedicated to the management of human movements and migrations in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

It was conducted after the Mediterranean Sea witnessed the most important displacements of people since the World War II. A situation that led to a scenario of growing concerns on managing these flows, where asylum seekers escaping from wars overlapped with economic migrants without legal permit to cross the border and rejected asylum seekers from other conflict areas, following the same migratory routes.

The questionnaire had 18 general questions (with 9 additional questions directed to all those participants with advanced knowledge) of specific elements of migration policies organised along four thematic blocks. The first one aimed at capturing the general perception on human movements in the Mediterranean. The second one was dedicated to EU, policies and instruments. The third one is focused on the challenges in and for the Southern neighbors of the EU. Questions from the last block covered bilateral, regional and international cooperation mechanisms.

With the results to the first block of questions, this presentation aims to evaluate the perception of respondents on the migration and refugee situation in the region. It also seeks to capture the perception on its causes, its consequences and on the policy responses implemented so far. Finally survey results also provide some mid-term prospective insights on human movements in the Mediterranean as well as its impact on the regional stability.

“Root causes of prejudice: perception of migrants as security threats and the socially-constructed nexus *migration-crisis-crime*”, Valeria Bello

International Migration has increasingly become a security concern in current times. Both severe climate change and the upsurge in violence and conflicts in various regions of the world have entailed a rise in international migration. The concurrent economic crisis has worsened countries' divides, providing opportunities for radical and populist groups to fuel the public discontent and use it at their own advantage. Indeed, anti-migrant campaigns have been the main issue around which these extremist groups have ignited citizens' unease, by blaming migrants for the worsening conditions of their countries.

Meanwhile, a related politics of securitization of migration has spread worldwide, pooling factors for socially constructing a *migration-crime-crisis* nexus that has escalated xenophobic dynamics in several societies. This has also unfolded a tendency to envelop in autarchy and leave supranational collaborative institutions, such as the Brexit case has shown.

On the one hand, this complex situation has further contributed to securitizing the theme of migration. On the other, the securitization of migration plays a crucial role in both negatively affecting the perceptions of migrants and the way migrants themselves sense their life in their new places. Facts on the exclusion from life opportunities – for both newcomers and the established – will show how these dynamics can develop into sources of different types of extremism, for instance racist radical and populist groups and terrorist groups, which, ultimately, mutually reinforce each other.

“Off Camera. How photographic representation of Melilla's border are framing perceptions on mobility: a gender focus”, Lorenzo Gabrielli

The border of Melilla represents a paradigmatic case to rethink the contemporary symbolic functions of borders for States and also to analyse the representation of the border through a gender perspective. This analysis will take depart from the dominant masculine representation of border crossings to fulfil a double purpose: on the one hand, understanding the mechanism of the dominant masculine representation and, on the other hand, bringing light to hidden crossings, and particularly women ones.

Firstly - through a qualitative analysis of main photographic representations in the press of men border crossings in Melilla - I will analyse how this “masculine border” characterised by strong security concerns is generated. Through a dominance of large groups of black men, whose face is unrecognizable, in “intense” attitudes and with broken clothes or bare-chested, the visual narrative of media foster a threat-related imaginary, echoing the invasion metaphor spread by political discourses.

Secondly, this over-representation of masculine figures at the border conceal other kind of crossings that, moreover, are numerically much more relevant. Then, I will display female border crossings starting from the paradigmatic treatment of sub-Saharan women jumping the fences. Beyond their anecdotic numerical weight, their case underlines the gender disparities in media treatment of irregular border crossing. Two other types of hidden flows – these of the *porteadoras* (‘mule women’) and of the large number of daily cross-border workers - are very consubstantial to the case of Melilla. The picture of the crossings is completed by another typology that has remained particularly marginal in media visual narratives: the refugee flows, mainly of Syrian families, entering in Melilla.

The dominant and selective masculine representation in Melilla -similarly to other fragments of the EU external border- allow to foster the classic defensive image of the border towards external threats creating suspicion over the “other” outside. This creates a favourable environment to spread a warlike narrative about irregular migration and the unquestionable need of newer security apparatus. The subsequent development of zones of exception and excess in Melilla, similarly to other fragments of the EU external border, represent then the theatrical stage where the State, through a violent symbolic representation, displays his visible action towards irregular crossings.

“The Razor’s Edge: Image and Corporeality at Europe’s Borders”, Parvati Nair

Ceuta and Melilla exemplify the vestiges of Empire in the present day. For Africans, in whose geographical terrain these border towns are located, access to these cities is synonymous with entry to Europe and thus with transcontinental migration. In their search for a better life, many migrants find themselves on the northward road to these towns, thereby having to cross the many state and other borders that safeguard European supremacy. The latter depends, therefore, on a kind of normativity that imposes historical, political and economic differences.

This paper will take its cue from the recent photo essay on Melilla by the Catalan photographer Samuel Aranda in order to explore the border of Europe and Africa, a frontier zone in the world that brings the most extreme political and economic differences together, as a site for the production of illegalities. The sub-Saharan migrants who feature in Aranda's images have illicitly crossed numerous state and other boundaries before facing the economic and legal chasm of crossing over into European soil. Ironically, it is precisely through the extreme inhumaneness of this border area that the human body becomes a site of resistance, whereby the suffering and the subjugation of the present is mitigated by the hope of a better future.

My focus in this paper is on the role of documentary photography to humanize border experiences. As these images reveal, the state borders protecting Europe may uphold European law, but in so doing, they also foster illegalities and inequities that cause extreme and prolonged suffering. In this sense, they mark the limits of European democracy and reveal a fault line at the heart of its practice. They raise major questions of human rights and justice and call for a revision of democracy to release itself from geopolitical and economic boundaries. More importantly, these photographs counter the dominant discourses that shape the debates on migration. By shifting our focus from questions of skills, economic utility and benefit (or not) that most often determine the responses of European host countries to migration, by foregrounding instead the vulnerability of the human body and by noting thereby the desperate need for human protection in transit, Aranda's work frames the question of hospitality as humane response, thereby revealing the inhumanity of existing legal frameworks that fabricate and uphold frontiers.