

Conference and Workshop Report

IMIS-Day 2010: The New Politics of International Mobility and Workshop: Disciplining Global Movements. Migration Management and its Discontents (12 and 13 November 2010)

by Duncan Cooper, University of Osnabrück

On the 12th and the 13th November, 2010, academics from around the world met at the IMIS Institute (Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies) of the University of Osnabrück in Germany to critically evaluate the concept of migration management and to appraise some of the ideas which have been developed in the recently published book 'The Politics of International Migration Management.'¹ On the first day, the 12th November, the institute played host to an international conference in which strategies adopted towards dealing with international mobility were critically appraised in five keynote speeches and a panel discussion. On the second day, a series of short presentations were given by early-stage researchers and scholars from a range of different academic disciplines working on issues connected to the management of migration in different parts of the world, although the large majority of the presentations focused on Europe. Both the conference and workshop were made possible by the funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung. The first section of this report briefly summarises the speeches given on the 12th November. The second section subsequently sums up some of the more important issues discussed in the workshop which took place the following day.

The conference started with a few introductory remarks by the director of the IMIS Institute, Andreas Pott. These were then followed by a more detailed introduction into the subject of migration management by the two organisers of the event, Martin Geiger (IMIS Osnabrück) and Antoine Pécoud (UNESCO Paris). Both stressed that while the term 'migration management' was now frequently used when discussing migration, very few attempts had been undertaken to precisely define the concept. In this context, the organisers added that one of the aims of the conference was to critically assess whether migration management represented merely a new way of talking about migration or a genuinely new approach towards dealing with migration flows.

Virginie Guiraudon (University of Lille) discussed this issue in the day's first presentation. The professor of political science questioned whether international organisations (IOs) employed catch-all phrases such as the much cited 'triple-win situation', whereby well managed migration can be a benefit for all parties involved (i.e. the countries of origin, the

¹ Martin Geiger/Antoine Pécoud (ed.) The Politics of International Migration Management (Palgrave, 2010).

countries of destination and the migrants themselves), and 'global governance' as smokescreens in order to push through their own agendas. She further emphasised that a fragmentation in the field of migration management was taking place due to the presence of increasing numbers of non-state actors engaged in migration management. Thus while the term migration management lacked on the one hand a degree of substance, the proliferation of actors was on the other allowing states and the EU as a whole to choose which issues they wished to address. The result had been an increasing diversification in the policies employed towards managing migration.

The lack of a coordinated strategy for dealing with the effects of migration at a Global or European level was bemoaned by the Chief of Staff of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) headquarters in Geneva, Peter Schatzer, in the day's second presentation. Mr Schatzer commented that the absence of a single migration strategy severely hampered the work of both the IOM and other organisations involved in managing migration. This was because the IOM, in the same way as many other organisations involved in migration management, is financed to a great extent through projects carried out on the behalf of individual states and supranational organisations (chiefly the European Union). In this context Mr. Schatzer added that the IOM was required to apply separately for funding for each individual project and was hence unable to make coherent, long term plans.

The next presentation was given by John Bingham, the Head of Policy of the International Catholic Mission Commission (ICMC) in Geneva. In a similar way to Mr. Schatzer, Mr. Bingham stressed the urgent need for a global response to the phenomenon of migration. He highlighted the reactionary, remedial nature of the migration strategies employed by European states and stressed that differing interests meant that European states did not always adopt identical policies on issues related to migration (e.g. the differences between the percentage of refugees whose asylum petitions were officially recognised in differing countries). The short-sighted, state-orientated nature of European migration policies prevented the development of more coherent strategies capable of doing justice to the complex nature of modern-day migration flows.

In the day's fourth presentation, William Walters (Carleton University, Ottawa) examined how an increasing fear of migration had led states to become more and more security conscious in their approach towards migration in the last few years. He critically appraised three different aspects of this increasing securitization of migration during his presentation. Mr. Walters showed initially that the 'policing' of transport routes (i.e. at ports of entry, state boundaries etc.) had a significant influence on the public's perceptions of migrants. Mr.

Walters labelled the conflicts which were taking place at the level of road (used as a metaphor to refer to all forms of transport) 'viapolitics'. The political scientist also suggested that the threat of uncontrolled international migration was resulting in perceptions of belonging to a country or nation increasing in importance- something which he labelled 'domopolitics' in allusion to the Latin term 'domos' meaning 'home' or 'domestic'. In the final part of the presentation, Mr. Walters explained how recent attempts to securitize and tighten national borders had gone hand in hand with a certain 'humanitarization' of migration management. By way of an example, Mr. Walters contrasted the attempts to securitize the US-Mexican border of the last few years with the humanitarian action of placing of water barrels along different sections of the border.

The day's final keynote speech was given by Bimal Ghosh. The renowned former UN migration expert and IOM Chief Consultant noted that, while attempts to manage migration were in themselves not new, the expression 'migration management' had been avoided up until the late 1980s. This was only to gradually change from the early 1990s onwards in wake of the new political and economic situation which had emerged following the collapse of communism. The editor of the seminal work 'Managing Migration. Time for a New International Regime?'² added that neither an open-door policy favoured by sections of the business community nor a restrictive, state-centred approach were capable of adequately responding to the challenges posed by migration in today's world. Instead, Mr. Ghosh argued that migration flows could best be managed by developing a set of comprehensive rules aimed at turning migration into a more predictable process. He labelled an approach of this nature 'regulated openness.' The conference finished with a discussion about the new politics of international mobility, during which future scenarios, critical perspectives and research gaps were discussed. The five keynote speakers together with Catherine de Wenden (Sciences Po, Paris), Andreas Pott (Osnabrück) and Antoine Pécoud (UNESCO, Paris) participated in a lively discussion on the issue of migration management in which both elements of the speeches and issues which had not been mentioned were discussed.

The international workshop 'Disciplining Global Movements. Migration Management and its Discontents' that took place the following day (13 November) was able to examine different aspects of the concept of migration management in a little more depth. Around 30 academics participated in the workshop, organized by Martin Geiger and Antoine Pécoud. The workshop was divided into three parallel sessions, each of which concentrated on a different aspect of the migration management paradigm.

² Bimal Ghosh (ed.) Managing Migration. Time for a New International Regime? (Oxford University Press, 2000).

The first session examined the discourse of migration management which has developed in the past few years. Migration management has, in the words of one of the participants, Christina Oelgemöller (University of Sussex/UK), “come to stand for the recognition that migration is a normal feature of today’s globalized world and should be more than the control of immigration by northern governments.” However, many participants criticised the concept as being too Eurocentric, and as merely serving the interests of European states. An example given here was the instrumental use of development aid to reduce migration pressures from developing countries (Janie Kisba Silga, European University Institute, Florence). In addition, discussions on migration management tend to produce a discourse which fits the needs of what Antonina Levatino (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) labelled the “central knots” of an increasingly interlinked, globalised system. In this respect the supposed ‘win-win-win’ situation can be exposed as being indeed to a certain extent an ‘empty shell’ which conceals the true hegemonic nature of the new migration discourse.

The second session critically evaluated international organisations and the management of migration. The number of international organisations involved in this field has increased exponentially in the last few years, especially following the adoption of the Global Approach to Migration by the European Commission in 2005. While increasing numbers of international bodies are now involved in migration management, the extent to which their involvement represents merely a continuation of a restrictive approach to migration was critically examined in many of the papers (e.g. Bernd Kasperek, University of Munich and Fabian Wagner, University of Frankfurt). In this context many presentations actively discussed the connection between the policies carried out by IOs and conceptualisation of migration management by European states, who together with the European Union largely finance programmes in developing countries (Clotilde Caillault, University of Amsterdam and Nadia Khrouz, NGO “GADEM”, Rabat). The involvement of IOs in migration management has increasingly allowed states and the EU to transfer responsibility of difficult projects to these non-governmental organisations and to thereby depoliticise issues related to migration. In this context some participants criticised the work of IOs as representing a mere continuation of the restrictive policies towards migration which states had previously employed (e.g. Fabian Georgi, University of Frankfurt and Susanne Schatral, University of Bremen).

The third session examined practices of migration management. Various different aspects of migration management were highlighted by scholars presenting papers during this session. One of these presentations examined the possible advantages and disadvantages of partnership programmes for developing countries by making reference to the mobility partnership recently signed between Cape Verde and the European Union (José Pina-

Delgado, University of Praia). The challenges faced by states when dealing with the presence of illegal migrants in their territory were also highlighted in some of the presentations given in this session. In this context Anne Koch (Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies) highlighted on the one hand the problems states experience in balancing humanitarian concerns with the desire to assert their sovereign right to control access into their territory. On the other hand, Adèle Garnier (University of Leipzig) showed that European states are increasingly interested in following the Australian example of selecting which refugees they want to accept and thus integrating asylum into a strategy of migration management.

Both the conference and the workshop succeeded in highlighting some of the reasons why states are becoming increasingly interested in managing migration flows. However, the various presentations given during the two days also showed many of the problems of this new discourse. In addition, it remains to be seen whether the unpredictable nature of migratory movements, and especially of refugees and other displaced persons, can ever be truly 'managed'.