



Repositioning critical border and migration studies in the face of authoritarian turns

Kritisnet conference, Göttingen 25.-27. Okt 2024

The political climate is rapidly heating up. At EU and national level, asylum and mobility rights are being eroded or abolished, and at the borders and within societies, racist violence is becoming the new normal. With few exceptions, the recent elections have swept right-wing populist authoritarian movements into parliaments and governments across Europe, clearly demonstrating the collapse of the political centre and an attack on the postmigrant society. At the same time, there is a lack of loud, politically strong voices from critical research, anti-racist movements and civil society. Faced with all this, we think it's time for a kritisnet conference!

In good old kritisnet practice, we want to gather our collective knowledge from critical research and activism on various burning issues of the radicalising migration and border regime and understand its current dynamics. This includes, for example, the field of deportation policy, the GEAS reform and its aftermath as well as the role of anti-smuggling policies for the border regime, but also the situation on the Balkan route and, more generally, an examination of the 'making and policing of routes'. We also want to follow the productivity of the border "inwards" and discuss its effects on migration, labour and social reproduction. And, of course, not forget the struggles of migration and activist practices.

At the same time, we don't just want to chase after these rapidly unfolding developments, but also pause to reflect on the connection between the border regime and its fetishisation and spectacularisation in right-wing to centrist politics as a cure-all and protection against external threats. For some time now, the rhetorical connections between migration and war have become more pronounced, for example in the talk of 'migration as a hybrid weapon'. Or, if that doesn't quite work geopolitically (as in Germany), the link between migration, islamophobia and terrorism gets reaffirmed. The effect, however, is the same: the ethno-nationalist closure at home comes with a racist reconfiguration of the European project. Calls for a nativist, strong sovereign state go hand in hand with demands for more controls at the border, or indeed its closure. In this sense, it is important to better understand this new/old nexus of border, authoritarian and right-wing/populist discourses and practices, how they mutually determine and reinforce each other and what their (societal, political) visions are.

At the same time, there has been a discursive shift since 7 October - under the banner of solidarity with Israel and in the spirit of a purified nation that has left its anti-Semitism behind. Criticising racism and colonialism in particular has become increasingly difficult since then - at times leading to material and severe legal consequences, especially for people, students and colleagues marked as migrants. This sense of insecurity has permeated deep into our structures. Self-censorship or keeping quiet was often the order of the day, making solidarities fragile. Not only was this great news for the right-wing populist camp, but it also meant that the political centre has moved further away from an anti-racist stance and praxis. Therefore, we must and want to take a closer look at these discursive shifts and the difficult positioning of anti-racist criticism and practice.

And so, the bottom line of the conference is to understand what "academic anti-fascism" could look like. What does it mean to conduct critical migration and border regime research under these conditions? Which forms of critique do we need (or not), and how can we sharpen and focus our critique together? But also: How do we build resilient structures that can withstand an AfD-led science or social ministry turning off the money tap and cancelling migration research or gender studies as pretentious science? And what role can and should kritisnet play in all these endeavours and criticisms?

Together with other initiatives and organisations, on Sunday we also want to discuss which political strategies and practical steps are now necessary to initiate alliances and coalitions against the authoritarian turn and to strengthen the backs of those who have become and are becoming the target of attacks.

We want to discuss this and more with you and look forward to your contributions and your knowledge!

Registration via:

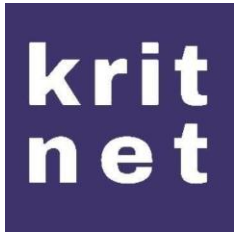
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Programme Overview

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<p>Arrival in Göttingen KWZ Heinrich-Düker-Weg 14 37073 Göttingen</p>	<p>Arrival and Coffee 9:30 – 10:30: Inputs & debate Critical Migration Research in the context of right-wing populist normalisation</p> <p><i>With Inputs by Bernd Kasperek, Maurice Stierl, Sabine Hess and others</i> <i>Moderation: Nikolai Huke</i></p>	<p>From 9:30: Informal Breakfast at KWZ -> bring some food to share!</p>
<p>From 15:00 Kick-off & Open Space: Exchange on projects, activism, (difficulties of) critical research and more</p> <p><i>With inputs by Simon Weiser, Marco Perolini and others</i></p>	<p>11:00 – 13:00: Workshops I</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Changes and Resistance in the Deportation Regime (Roundtable Discussion) <i>With Lisa Borelli, Janis Geschke, Aino Korvensyrjä, Leon Schlüter, Svenja Schurade,</i> 2) Between route-making and route-policing <i>With Sebastian Cobarrubias, Paolo Cuttitta, Federico Rahola, Maurice Stierl</i> 3) Labour Struggles <i>With Peter Birke, Nikolai Huke, Andreea-Valentina Moraru</i> 	<p>10:00 – 11:30: kritnet next steps Taking stock, planning & admin</p> <p><i>Moderation: Karl Heyer, Hannah Sommer</i></p>
<p>16:00 – 17:30: Topical hour On recent developments in the border regime</p> <p><i>With Hannah Sommer, Bernd Kasperek</i></p>	<p>13:00 – 14:30: Break and Lunch at Mensa</p> <p>14:30 – 16:30: Workshops II</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Criminalisation of smuggling as a driving force in the border regime? <i>With Valeria Hänsel, Leonie Jantzer, Karl Heyer</i> 2) Migration along the 'Balkan Route(s)': Persistent Challenges and Emerging Trends <i>With Marijana Hamersak, Sanela Klepic, Milica Svabic, Theresa Wagner, Pauline Zapke</i> 3) Democratic civil society as the enemy?! Saxony as a cautionary example <i>With Hannah Franke, Özcan Karadeniz</i> 	<p>12:00 – 16:00 Open Strategy Debate</p> <p><i>With Inputs by Napuli Paul Langa, Christian Jakob, Welcome United, GegenRechtSchutz, Antifaschistische Plattform and others</i> <i>Moderation: Valeria Hänsel</i></p>
<p>18:00 – 19:30: Panel discussion On the border regime and the authoritarian transformation in Europe</p> <p><i>With Anna Casaglia, Valeria Hänsel, Serhat Karakayalı, Robert Nestler</i></p>	<p>18:00: Dinner +++ Different Location: At OM10 +++ Obere-Masch-Straße 10, 37073 Göttingen</p>	
<p>20:00: Dinner and Get-Together +++ Different Location: Stadtlabor +++ Alte Mensa Wilhelmsplatz 3, 37073 Göttingen</p>	<p>19:00 – 20:30: Panel Refugee struggles and the right to opacity. Refusals and research from below</p> <p><i>With Annika Lindberg, Salim Nabi, Steve Nwaogu</i> +++ Different Location: At OM10 +++ Obere-Masch-Straße 10, 37073 Göttingen</p>	



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Programme Details, 25. October 2024

16:00 – 17:30: Topical Hour

On recent developments in the border regime

With Hannah Sommer, Bernd Kasperek

CEAS reform, fast-track procedures, detention centres, the Rwanda model, refoulement at internal borders, abolition of the right to asylum. Far too much has moved to the right in recent years, and even more is potentially on the horizon. This weekend will (also) deal with all these issues. We want everyone to be able to actively take part in the discussions over these three days. But we also know that it is difficult to follow the political dynamics. In the topical hour, we therefore want to have a conversation about current developments. We will jointly reconstruct what has been happening in recent years, and we will answer the questions that have arisen about these developments together. We will bring each other up to date and we'll collectively multiply critical knowledge.

18:00 – 19:30: Panel discussion

On the border regime and the authoritarian transformation in Europe

With Anna Casaglia, Valeria Hänsel, Serhat Karakayali, Robert Nestler

The border has played a central role in right-wing populist policies that openly break with European and national law - that much is clear, and not only since the CDU's latest absurd demands to close the borders to Syrian and Afghan refugees and carry out deportations from the border. Even though research has shown for 30 years that tighter border infrastructures and controls do not significantly curb movements, but only make them more expensive and increase people's suffering, in recent years we have seen a veritable fetishisation of the border and its violent spectacularisation. In this panel discussion, we want to take a closer look at this border-right-wing populist nexus and ask: How do the new EU-European brutal, violent border and the authoritarian transformations of European societies and politics mutually constitute and support each other? Which role does the border play in and for right-wing populist discourses and programmes? And how can we break this nexus?



Repositioning critical border and migration regime studies in the face of authoritarian turns

Programme Details, 26. October 2024

09:30 – 10:30: Inputs and discussion

Critical Migration Research in the context of right-wing populist normalisation

With Inputs by Bernd Kasperek, Maurice Stierl, Sabine Hess and others
Moderation: Nikolai Huke

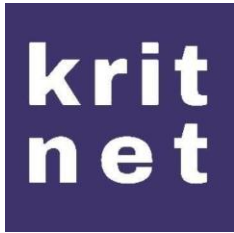
A 30% AfD share in the state parliaments alone would be cause for concern, but the right-wing populist bloc extends far into the old political centre, which itself is taking increasingly extreme positions on migration policy. Things that yesterday seemed impossible to say have become overtaken by current developments. The alliance of critical migration research with the rule of law of recent years, the insistence that existing legal norms must not be overstepped, has long been helpless in the face of a general problematisation of the 'power of law' and loud calls to roll back juridification efforts. In the face of these institutional and political conditions, what does it mean to practice critical migration, racism and border research? On a practical and material level, but also in terms of content? What does 'critical' mean today, and how can our critical positions be brought back to the forefront of public debate? Who should we forge alliances with? What would academic anti-fascism look like? After four inputs we want to discuss all this with you.

11:00 – 13:00: Workshop I

1) Deportations

With Lisa Borelli, Janis Geschke, Aino Korvensyrjä, Leon Schlüter, Svenja Schurade

Since the long summer of migration in 2015, a recalibration and tightening of European deportation regimes can be observed. Migration, solidarity and protest are increasingly criminalised, human rights standards further lowered, and deportations and asylum procedures are increasingly outsourced to third countries. These developments are accompanied by the spread of discourses, which allegedly justify these measures and at the same time rhetorically anticipate a future tightening of policies. We take these developments as a starting point to look at current changes and resistance in the deportation regime. Instead of individual presentations, we invite academics, NGOs and activists to join our roundtable to discuss, among others, the following questions: (1) What is currently happening in deportation regimes and how does this relate to other social changes? (2) Which intersectional aspects are so far less visible in the context of deportations; which overlapping techniques of power can be identified? (3) Where do we see moments or starting points for resistance; where do we find hope? (4) How can research and activism come together and find common possibilities for change?



Repositioning critical border and migration regime studies in the face of authoritarian turns

Programme Details, 26. October 2024

11:00 – 13:00: Workshop I

2) Between route-making and route-policing

With Sebastian Cobarrubias, Paolo Cuttitta, Federico Rahola, Maurice Stierl

Routes can be conceived of as segments of mobile biographies which form and transform themselves spatially, through their relationship with given contexts. Within restrictive border regimes, unauthorised migrant routes are ruptures in the supposedly ordered fabric of governmental policies and practices of migration management. Meanwhile, the term “route” has been increasingly appropriated by governmental and intergovernmental actors, which use it to design their migration policies, thus turning routes to borders. Hence the question: should we look for alternative terms, or rather defend the original meaning of the word, attesting to the creative power of migration? The vagueness of the notion raises broader terminology issues: is there a difference between terms such as route, corridor, trajectory, journey etc.? Routes are also unpredictable in their spatial and temporal developments, as they must adapt to contexts. This opens up contentious spaces that are inevitably political. Thus, route-making can be understood as a political act, and routes as (mobile) subaltern infrastructures that are the material outcome of specific forms of agency, cooperation and solidarity among people on the move. Importantly, solidarity contributing to route-making can also come from non-migrant actors. Mapping the different actors involved in processes of route-making and route-policing, and their motivations and practices, may provide an overview of border regimes from the route perspective (“seeing like a route”). Such perspective may also help unveil Western-centric approaches in studying and governing routes. The route concept could be de-westernized by questioning both Euro-centric (“all routes lead to Rome”) and univocal/linear (“from A to B”) assumptions.

Finally, routes can be interrupted by death and disappearance, which, however, can also be generative of new routes: not only for the corpses of the individuals concerned but also for family members and activists mobilizing against the necropolitical border regime. This workshop aims to identify ethnographic and conceptual issues that may open up new avenues for research on routes and route-making. Discussion topics may include, but must not be limited to: Terminology (route, trajectory, journey, corridor etc.) – Migrants’ agency in route-making – Non-migrant actors of route-making – Routes as (mobile) lived-in spaces – Solidarity and route-making – De-Westernizing routes – Routes as specific objects of policing/borderization – Death routes.



Repositioning critical border and migration regime studies in the face of authoritarian turns

Programme Details, 26. October 2024

11:00 – 13:00: Workshop I

3) Labour Struggles

With Peter Birke, Nikolai Huke, Andreea-Valentina Moraru

Researchers and non-researchers have been trying to tell the story of the border for years. Large fences, barbed wire, sinking ships and border police evoking images of “fortress Europe” show realities of what is happening at the margins of the nation-state. Oftentimes, the perception of the border stops with these evocations. And yet, as critical migration and border regime researchers have shown, the border seeps beyond a geographic place in multiple (re)negotiations within the fabric of the Social. In their process of being migrantized, those arriving/transiting/staying experience differentiating practices constructed through the border regime which have a considerable impact on their everyday – such as conditioning residency and access to welfare through a wage labor imperative. For many, this creates a push into illegalized, unsafe, precarious low-wage industries which, paradoxically, endangers their ability to perform wage labor and social reproduction.

In a call that aligns with Dahinden’s (2016) plea for demigrantizing migrant research and migrantizing social research, we ask how the productivity of the border is created (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) not just as the lived experience of the migrantized, but a perspective of a transnational component of the current social, economic and political order. How is the making, shifting and blurring of multiple borders productive in the dynamics of migration, labor and social reproduction? What role does migrantization play in this process? What are the conflicts in which migrantized individuals participate that shape the processes of border (un)making themselves?

14:30 – 16:30: Workshop II

1) Criminalisation of smuggling as a driving force in the border regime?

With Valeria Hänsel, Leonie Jantzer, Karl Heyer

Which role does the criminalisation of smuggling play for the European border regime? In this workshop, we want to discuss this with you based on brief overviews of various national contexts and a look at the new EU Facilitator's Package. Our hypothesis is that the criminalisation of smuggling can be seen as the third pillar of the border regime, alongside the fight against migration and the erosion of the asylum system. But despite the fact that this form of criminalisation takes place in numerous places at the EU's external borders and beyond, we as critical academics and activists have not yet developed a common, differentiated language about this phenomenon. Together, we want to exchange ideas and discuss how we can talk about smuggling in a critical and differentiated way and counteract the simplifications in public debates, and which opportunities for intervention we see in relation to the Facilitator Package and beyond.



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Programme Details, 26. October 2024

14:30 – 16:30: Workshop II

2) Migration along the 'Balkan Route(s)': Persistent Challenges and Emerging Trends

With Marijana Hamersak, Sanela Klepic, Milica Svabic, Theresa Wagner, Pauline Zapke

This workshop will explore the complex dynamics of migration along the 'Balkan Route(s)', focusing on both the long-standing challenges faced by People on the Move and solidarity structures on the ground, and emerging trends shaping the region and its migration policies. Experts from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia are invited to provide insights into the current migration policies, border management practices and the lived experience of those navigating these routes. The panel will be facilitated by members of the "Balkanbrücke".

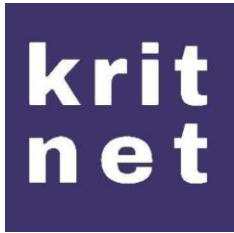
14:30 – 16:30: Workshop II

3) Democratic civil society as the enemy?! Saxony as a cautionary example

With Hannah Franke, Özcan Karadeniz

Recently, a special report by the Saxonian Court of Auditors forced the umbrella organisation of Saxonian migrant organisations into insolvency. The same Court of Auditors also demands political neutrality from all state-funded civil society organisations. At the same time, the AfD targets unwelcome civil society organisations in a parliamentary committee of enquiry in the Saxony state parliament, while in Saxony-Anhalt the party has tabled a motion to increase scrutiny of social and welfare organisations and expand the audit rights of the state court of auditors. Democratically committed civil society organisations are increasingly becoming the target of politically motivated attacks - and it seems that political bureaucracy is being used as a useful tool.

Hannah Franke (board member of Sächsischer Flüchtlingsrat e.V.) & Özcan Karadeniz (former managing director of Dachverband sächsischer Migrant*innen*organisationen e.V.) will shed light on the attacks on civil society organisations and the rupture taking place in Saxony. Afterwards there will be room for discussion.



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Programme Details, 26. October 2024

19:00 – 20:30: Panel

+++ at OM10 +++

Refugee struggles and the right to opacity refusals and research from below

With Annika Lindberg, Salim Nabi, Steve Nwaogu

Much research in refugee studies has focused on explicating the (ethnographic, social, and political) details of refugee lives and struggles. Such research practices, which presumes the researcher’s unlimited ‘right to know’ the pain, suffering, and struggles of the subaltern, have been challenged by Black feminist, indigenous and decolonial scholars (hooks 1990; Simpson 2007; Tuck and Yang 2014). Following their propositions and reflections on *refusal as a method*, this panel aims to provide a reflection on the ethical and political limitations that research must pose to and impose onto itself. Eduard Glissant (1976, 1997) reminds us of the right to opacity, which Shahram Khosravi extends to migration studies as “sensibilities toward the right to opacity, i.e. that not *everything* should be seen, observed, understood, explained, and documented” (Khosravi, 2024, p. 7). We take these propositions as an invitation to discuss the possibilities and potentialities of researching “with and for” refugee struggles as opposed to researching “the” refugee struggles in times of rising authoritarianism and border repression.



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Programme Details, 27. October 2024

10:00 – 11:30: kritnet next steps: Taking stock, planning, admin

Moderation: Karl Heyer, Hannah Sommer

Where do we stand as a network, what's next? There is room here to take the momentum of the weekend with us, make plans and come to agreements.

12:00 – 16:00: Open strategy debate

With Inputs by Napuli Paul Langa, Christian Jakob, Welcome United, GegenRechtSchutz, Antifaschistische Plattform and others

Moderation: Valeria Hänsel

What can be done against the rise of the right, rampant racism, renationalisation, the deportation industry and brutal anti-migration measures?

We want to come together with anti-fascist, anti-racist, self-organised initiatives, critical scholars and lawyers, critical journalists, civil society and NGOs.

With inputs from East and West and with different positionalities, we will discuss various perspectives on the authoritarian shift in a fishbowl format and then collectively address the question: What can we do? What do we need now in political terms?