



Translocal Figurations of Displacement – conceptual and methodological reflections on the role of connectivity and mobility in protracted displacement

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As more and more people are displaced by war, conflicts and loss of livelihoods and as territorial borders, local regulations and asylum regimes have tightened, protracted displacement situations (PDS) have emerged or become consolidated. PDS are characterized by entrenched conditions of suffering, precarity and rightlessness as well as spatial and social immobility. Classical approaches to PDS, i.e. local integration, return and resettlement, do not seem to deliver ‘durable solutions’. The paper argues that translocality provides an alternative framework for resolving PDS. It builds on consolidated knowledge in mobility research and studies on refugees’ livelihoods and links these with conceptual debates in figurational sociology.

On this basis I argue that investigating “translocal figurations of displacement” requires us to move beyond a place-based research design and adopt a more flexible multi-sited ethnography. Such an approach to empirical research allows for an investigation into the connections and disconnections between places in refugees’ journeys, into displaced people’s perceptions of these sites, their own mobility and transnational networks, and into the inherent dynamics in these social figurations.

The paper presents the core concept and the methodology of a large-scale EU-funded research project that investigates “Transnational Figurations of Displacement” (TRAFIG) in and beyond East Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

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