

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Labour migrants from the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey and their contributions to social transformation in Western Europe, 1960-1990

WORKSHOP

26-27 September 2024
KADOC-Leuven (Belgium)

KU LEUVEN



Ever since their arrival in the 1960s, labour migrants from the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey have been drivers of change in Western European societies. Their labour was essential to Western Europe's economic growth, while their presence rejuvenated the region's aging demography. Simultaneously, their cultures prompted a wide array of new encounters, while their mobility was key to the transformations of Europe's growing urban centres. Migrant communities furthermore introduced new knowledge, and their modes of religiosity added additional complexity to the position of religion in the public sphere. Finally, their precarious economic positions provoked new debates on the role of the welfare state, while their perceived 'otherness' challenged Eurocentric understandings of nationalisms, citizenship, social rights, and what it means to co-exist.

Historiography is starting to recognize the transformative power of labour migrants. However, scholars note that it remains challenging to fully integrate migrants' pivotal roles into our fundamental comprehension of social, cultural, and political change in Western Europe. The histories of migrant communities are often written in parallel with, but largely distinct from, histories of globalization, nationalisms, democratization, social movements and activisms, changing religious landscapes, technological and scientific advances, environmental awareness, ...

This workshop aims to merge these subfields and to integrate the history of post-war labour migration into a larger narrative. We welcome contributions of varied historical fields, such as urban history, decolonization studies, gender history, the history of emotions and knowledge, and the history of social movements, with a scope from 1960 to 1990. Interdisciplinary contributions from the fields of anthropology, religious studies, cultural and art studies, and social geography are also encouraged.

SPACES OF ENCOUNTER

Change can be sought after, provoked, achieved, or it can happen unintentionally, but it is generally a product of new encounters. Whether those were characterized by concordance, mutual neglect, opposition, or a complex combination of these, migrants learned to navigate the Western European social web, and changed it through their own associational life, social movements and activism, popular media, and cultural, religious, and artistic practices. Additionally, migrants and migrant associations interacted with a wide array of new social vocabularies, such as those of gender, ecology, mental health, technology, and alternative spiritualism. By encouraging research on reactions to these social changes, we hope to discover both the grand and subtle changes migrants helped provoke.

POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Amidst the changing political constellations of Western European nation states, the prolonged settlement of labour migrants added several layers of complexity. First, their precarity exposed the faltering solidarity of the national welfare state, while their struggle for political participation forced countries to re-think, defend, or safeguard their understanding of national identities and citizenship. On a higher level, the phenomenon of labour migration played a role in European integration processes, while labourers sought to defend their rights as non-EER subjects. We invite explorations on how their formal and informal civic involvement impacted politics and policies in Western Europe.

THE ROLE OF THE TRANSNATIONAL

People with a migrant background often maintained ties to their country of origin, whether it was through family connections, associational life, or through relations with their home state. Today's scholarship urges us to revisit this position in-between their country of origin and the country of residence, not as an immobilizing hindrance, but rather as a transnational space which fosters new exchanges and modes of living. Additionally, scholarship emphasizes labour migrants as 'truly transnational', building bridges between diasporic communities across Europe. With this in mind, we want to explore if and how labour migrants can be understood as harbingers of globalization processes.



TIMELINE

APPLICATION DEADLINE > 1ST OF MAY 2024

Abstracts of ca. 350 words can be uploaded [online](#) or sent to stijn.carpentier@kuleuven.be by the 1st of May 2024.

Accepted authors will be notified before the 1st of July 2024. We ask accepted authors to provide a substantial working paper by the 1st of September 2024.

We hope to bring together all contributions in an edited volume, to be published in 2025.

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