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## **On the Relevance of the Academic Study of ‘Migration and Crime’**

### **Preface to the First Issue of Kriminologie – Das Online Journal | Criminology – The Online Journal**

The release of the first issue of Kriminologie – Das Online Journal | Criminology – The Online Journal comes at a time when the topics of flight and migration are high on the political agenda and attracting a great deal of public attention. It is therefore no coincidence that the editors-in-chief of this journal have chosen ‘Migration and Crime’ as the focal topic of this first issue. While it would be inappropriate for the academic discourse to be driven by current events or political cycles when choosing research topics, it is still important to address urgent topics systematically and critically, which is, after all, the fundamental purpose of academic research. Nevertheless, what is to be regarded as significant should be defined as autonomously as possible by academia itself. That way it can be assured that scholars are also covering topics that are less frequently mentioned in public discourse but are nonetheless relevant. German-speaking criminology has so far only paid very limited attention to evidence of illegal refoulements, re-settlements and mistreatment at the European Union’s external borders. The same goes for collaborations between EU states and various regimes along the migration routes that are questionable from a human rights perspective. Moreover, the consequences of the increasing securitisation of migration debates have so far been widely neglected.

It is not a fundamentally new phenomenon that risks of crime (perpetrated by migrants) become a core issue of public discourse on migration and flight in times of high immigration. However, it is simply not true, although regularly suggested otherwise, that this topic has so far not been examined by criminological studies. Sociology of crime (and deviance) in the USA has been conducting research on this subject since its early days (mainly in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, a city heavily influenced by migration). Western European criminology started studying the topic when labour immigrants and their families, who had migrated in the 1950s, began securing their stay; immigration from former colonies (for instance, in the Netherlands) has also played a role in influencing criminologists to take up the issue. German criminology has, for example, intensively studied the situation of ethnic German resettlers after the end of the 1990s. Therefore, it is apparently wrong to speak of tabooing this undoubtedly politically charged topic.

‘Migration and crime’ is a perfect example of a cross-cutting criminological topic: in addition to etiological aspects (i.e. the existence of differences in the level of crime and, if any, how these can be explained), it also raises questions about processes of criminalising migration as well as migrants and about specific risks of victimisation. Besides, it also includes differing questions on the accessibility of the police force and the judiciary for members of minority groups, as well as on respective criminal policy discourses and their implications for the receiving society.

Finally, each of the two processes – migration and crime – is a highly heterogeneous phenomenon in itself. It holds true that even in the European context, internationally comparative analyses of diverging immigration processes, admission contexts and policies appear to be highly expandable (see Walburg, 2019; Melossi, 2015).

The immigration of an exceptionally high number of persons seeking protection in 2015 and at the beginning of 2016 raised partially new questions which are only now being addressed as part of initial research projects. German-speaking criminology has so far only dedicated marginal research effort to the possible peculiarities of situations facing refugees in earlier periods of immigration (e.g. in the 1990s). Such specific conditions might stem from stressful experiences, limited attachments and resources and a residence permit framework that can result in barriers to integration. Most of the current research projects are still ongoing and cannot provide (final) results just yet. Therefore, academia faces a dilemma: the recent (legitimate and welcome) public interest in an academic assessment of the migration discourse calls for answers that empirical studies will only be able to provide in the future. Meanwhile, the migration discourse is currently characterised by the topics of security and crime, and permanently fuelled by actors on the right-wing populist or right-wing extremist spectrum (with all its well-known blurring of lines). But many of these claims can only partially be answered by looking at absolute numbers of suspects as per the Police Crime Statistics and the inaccurate population numbers listed in the central register of foreigners. Nonetheless, former experience from Germany and other countries may help to sort out current developments. Despite limited empirical findings on the latest immigration processes, it remains important to stand up against the scaremongering by certain actors, such as the publicist Roland Tichy ('Tichy's Insight'; "90 % of male asylum seekers older than ten displayed delinquent behaviour", and "since 2015 every (working) day one person has been killed by a protection-seeking immigrant"<sup>1</sup> or the politician Andreas Kalbitz (AfD Brandenburg; "in 2018, 230 German citizens were killed by refugees"<sup>2</sup>). These actors come up with ever more bizarre misrepresentations of the current crime situation (which has, in fact, shown clear downward trends) (cf. Boers, Walburg & Kanz, 2017; Pfeiffer, Baier & Kliem, 2018).

But these facts will not stop those who play the well-known (and, as far as their objectives are concerned, effective) game of scandalising ("everything is getting worse"), simplifying ("the refugees", "the Muslims") and of ethnicising ("because they are Arabic"). Furthermore, those recipients who have become entrenched in their resentments can only marginally be reached by academic arguments. This is especially true given that academia is often quickly assigned to the world of the 'elite', which is viewed critically, and its results are only made use of when it fits with one's own world view. The latter does not exclusively hold true for those milieus, but it does apply specifically to such groups. Nevertheless – and despite all perceivable trends towards a "disenchantment" ("Entzauberung") of academia's claim to truth, understanding and knowledge (Beck, 1986) which has been lingering for quite some time –, there is hope that the (vast) majority can most certainly be reached by academic assessments. All the more so if these

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.tichyseinblick.de/meinungen/das-ende-des-einzelfalls/> (2019, September 27). The presented calculations are methodologically wrong for various reasons (among others, a false population benchmark figure). The second, just as incorrect claim can be found at: <https://www.tichyseinblick.de/video/kommentar/michael-ist-nicht-der-haeufigste-name-des-taeters-sondern-mohamed/> (2019, September 27); for an assessment, see: <https://www.watson.de/deutschland/kriminalitaet/C3%A4t/287541139-faktencheck-in-deutschland-wird-nicht-taeglich-mensch-von-asyllbewerbern-getoetet> (2019, September 27).

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuQUyPhPcOA> (2019, September 27). The representation of the 'Immigration' situation by the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) proves to be misleading and prone to misuse; see: <https://www.volksverpetzer.de/analyse/230-deutsche/> (2019, September 27)

assessments name existing problems, categorise them in a factual and differentiated way and point out potential solutions, if possible.

The articles in this issue mirror the range of perspectives and methodological approaches to the field of migration and crime, and explore different questions both familiar and new. Dirk Baier and Dominic Kudlacek use data from the latest student survey to examine whether a higher rate of violence among pupils from migrant worker families (compared to pupils without a migration background) may be explained through the effects of social disintegration and subcultural, anomie or learning theory. Steffen Zdun also studies the emergence of youth violence. His analysis, based on qualitative interviews, focuses on the meaning of a homogenous peer-network and the consequences of an observed softening of ethnic barriers. Elisa Garcia España and Jacqueline Carvalho da Silva shed light on the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors and all their specific challenges. Their paper analyses a programme to prevent delinquency among unaccompanied foreign minors in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. Finally, Christine Graebisch explores 'crimmigration', a phenomenon recently discussed in international criminology, which describes the interlinkage between criminal law and migration control. She analyses the negative feedback that this link entails for protection standards in both fields of law.

## References

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