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Psychology and human mobility: Introduction to the special issue and ways forward

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The European socio-political context

This special issue was conceived as part of an effort to understand human geographical mobility from a psychological perspective. Human mobility across space is as old as humanity, but the last few years have been marked by unprecedented immigration and by the so-called 'refugee crisis', making mobility more politicised than ever. According to the latest UN International immigration report, there were 244 million international migrants in 2015 globally. Most of these migrants came from the Global South and migrated to countries of the Global North.

In this special issue, we focus particularly on the European context. There are various features that make this context particularly pertinent for the study of human mobility. The principle of freedom of movement in the European Union, in which most European countries are part (and others, like Norway and Switzerland, are closely affiliated with), means that people can travel and work freely in other member states. In other words, (intra-European) immigration is part and parcel of contemporary understandings of Europe as envisioned by the EU. Mobile Europeans epitomise the human dimension of European integration (Recchi & Favell, 2009). However, this is far from uncontested, for example, with migrants from Eastern Europe being particularly stigmatised in Western Europe (e.g. Fox, Morosanu & Szilassy, 2012, in the UK context).

In addition to 'internal' European mobility, overseas immigration is also a controversial issue in Europe. Seen from a perspective of population growth and development, European countries need overseas immigration in order to address problems arising out of slower population growth and, in some countries, population decline (The Economist, 2017). According to 2016 Eurostat data, despite more deaths than births, the European population grew in 2016 because of migration. From this perspective, immigration can be seen as a way to redistribute the world population. This is especially so in some European countries such as Germany whose population is expected to decline by 18% without immigration (ibid.)

However, in the context of the Eurozone crisis (also known as the European sovereign debt crisis) and the so-called 'European refugee crisis', immigration has become a very contentious matter. Refugees, from war-torn Syria and other countries such as Afghanistan and Eritrea, have crossed (or attempted to cross) the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. Over 1.3 million asylum applications were made in 2015 and over 1.2 million applications were made in 2016 in countries of the EU28, based on Eurostat data (Eurostat, n.d.). Notwithstanding a surge in public support, particularly following the widespread circulation of pictures of young Alan Kurdi on

the Turkish coast¹, most European countries have been reluctant to accept refugees and other migrants. Governments across Europe have implemented extra measures to secure their national borders and many migrants have been stranded in the entry points of South Europe. In parallel, the regulation of immigration and the accommodation of migrants in national societies has been the subject of debates, tensions and negotiations among EU member states.

The refugee crisis, alongside the European sovereign debt crisis that started in 2009 and has had a deep impact in Greece, Ireland and Portugal, have created a fertile ground for the rise of anti-EU, anti-immigration and anti-Islamic sentiments. This is most evident in the growth of anti-immigration movements and political parties across the continent. For instance, the far-right nationalist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) was elected in the German parliament as the third largest party in 2017. This was the first time in 60 years that a nationalist party entered the German parliament. In France, the National Front came close to winning the French Presidential elections of 2017. In Greece (one of the main entry points into Europe for migrants from the Middle East), Golden Dawn, an extreme right-wing and anti-immigration party, is currently (2018) the fourth largest party despite having been connected with anti-immigration violence and other criminal acts. Concerns over immigration have also been one of the biggest factors contributing to the so-called Brexit (i.e. British Exit from the European Union) vote in the UK in 2016. As has been noted in relevant analyses (e.g. Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017), concerns over rising immigration was the most important issue for voters supporting Brexit. Immigration has overall problematized European politics, exposing deep questions about the future shape of political institutions in a globalised world. Debates about democracy and national sovereignty in the context of the European Union are also debates about freedom of movement. The broader vision of the EU is also at stake, with conflicting narratives (e.g. of an open and humanitarian Europe versus a 'Fortress Europe') regarding the role of Europe in issues of international human mobility.

It is within this sociopolitical context, that the six papers of this special issue are positioned. In what follows we present the papers and discuss their contribution to the field of psychology and human mobility.

Overview of the special issue: key themes and questions

Psychology is not new in the field of immigration. There has been much research on issues around acculturation and intercultural relations (e.g. Sam & Berry, 2016), migrant identities (e.g. Deaux, 2006; Verkuyten, 2005), prejudice and discrimination (e.g. Dixon & Levine, 2012; Tileaga, 2015), and multiculturalism (e.g. Moghaddam, 2008), among many others. In this section, we consider how the papers of this special issue relate to and extend existing literature to new directions.

¹ Alan Kurdi was a three-year-old Syrian boy who was found drowned near Bodrum, Turkey, in September 2015. Alan Kurdi and his family were refugees trying to reach Europe. Photographs of Alan Kurdi's dead body on the Turkish coast circulated broadly in the media around the world, leading to a (short-lived) surge of international support towards refugees.

The special issue papers focus on different aspects of immigration: processes of integration (Figgou & Baka; Sammut, Jovchelovitch, Buhagiar, Veltri, Redd & Salvatore), representations of migrants (Kadianaki, Avraamidou, Ioannou & Panagiotou; Sammut et al.), prejudice (Gibson & Booth), perspective-taking in intercultural relations (Glăveanu & de Saint Laurent), and experiences of mobility from the perspectives of migrants themselves (Zittoun, Levitan & Cangiá). The papers report findings from empirical research conducted in different European societies (Greece, Malta, UK, Cyprus and Switzerland) and from internet-based research (Glăveanu & de Saint Laurent).

In order to map out the special issue, we will consider three different facets of immigration that are addressed by the papers: (i) ideological resources that shape political and public perceptions towards immigration; (ii) processes of dialogical engagement with the 'other'; and (iii) immigration experiences and practices from the perspectives of mobile people themselves. For each of these, we will outline the contribution of the special issue papers and raise some important questions that future work in the field should, in our view, address.

(i) Ideological resources

With regards to the issue of ideological resources, Gibson & Booth's and Figgou & Baka's discursive analyses of immigration discourses are illuminating. These two papers adopt a discursive approach: instead of studying prejudice (Gibson & Booth) and acculturation (Figgou & Baka) as categories that are assigned from the top-down (i.e. from psychologists and other researchers), they are studied as 'lived' categories that are mobilised in everyday and political rhetoric and are politically consequential. These papers are aligned with and extend a long critical tradition in social psychology that foregrounds lay political thinking and understands processes of categorisation as political acts (Billig, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Figgou and Baka's paper contributes to a critique of acculturation studies, largely emanating from Berry's widely used model (e.g. Sam & Berry, 2016). Several acculturation theorists have critiqued (e.g. Andreouli, 2013; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010; Ward, 2008) and/or expanded (e.g. Navas, Rojas, García, & Pumares, 2007) Berry's influential model, on the grounds that it does not sufficiently account for the role of cultural meanings and contextual specificities in acculturation process. Figgou and Baka's paper offers a novel approach to the concept of acculturation by stressing its discursive manifestations in everyday interactions. According to their approach, different acculturation strategies can be understood as discursive resources that are embedded in ideological and cultural traditions. These resources are actively used in everyday encounters and they are therefore consequential for intercultural relations.

Gibson and Booth's paper similarly contributes to a discursive approach to prejudice (e.g. Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Durrheim, Quayle & Dixon, 2016). Moving beyond an understanding of prejudice as an internal disposition of individuals, Gibson and Booth focus instead on the politics of constructions of prejudice. Their study looks at

how prejudice is discursively constructed, managed and denied in everyday talk and explores the broader ideological implications of these discursive practices.

Gibson and Booth in their paper report on an analysis of television debates and interviews from the 2015 UK General election focusing particularly on speakers representing the right-wing and anti-EU UK Independence Party (UKIP), which emerged as third party in number of votes. Gibson and Booth's detailed analysis of UKIP's talk about the 'Australian points-based system'² shows how (neo-)liberal ideological themes, such as individualism and meritocracy, are used by UKIP to argue for controlling immigration in a seemingly deracialised fashion. By arguing for a points-based system, whereby migrants would be assessed based on their individual skills, UKIP is able to present its politics as reasonable and economy-based, thus countering potential accusations of racist prejudice that could be levelled against it.

The theme of post-racism is also present in Figgou and Baka's paper, in a discursive psychological study of educators' talk about integration of migrant pupils in Greek primary and secondary schools. Figgou and Baka show that educators construct the school as a racism-free environment of intercultural respect and harmonious relations. This post-racial rhetoric is based on the assumption of cultural similarity between Greek and migrant students. But maintaining cultural distinctiveness is also talked about as a valued principle for multicultural societies by the participants of Figgou and Baka's study. This research brings to the fore a liberal dilemma (c.f. Billig et al., 1988) between cultural sameness as the basis for social cohesion, on the one hand, and respect for diversity, on the other. According to Figgou and Baka, contemporary policy approaches on integration are shaped by this dilemma of endorsing diversity, for example, in multicultural education programmes, and at the same time promoting assimilation, for example through assimilative citizenship policies.

Kadianaki, Avraamidou, Ioannou and Panagiotou's paper also illustrates the work of an ideological tension between the value of universalistic humanitarianism and that of nation-centred utilitarianism. In their media analysis of Greek Cypriot newspapers, they showed that migrants were constructed, in utilitarian terms, as assets to the Cypriot economy or, in humanitarian terms, as victims who needed protection. Mirroring these favourable representations, unfavourable representations constructed migrants as a threat to the economy and as a threat to the nation's culture. As Kadianaki et al. note, both the utilitarian and the humanitarian frame are potentially problematic. On the one hand, a utilitarian approach to immigration may only serve the interests of economic elites and be used to justify the exploitation of migrant labour. On the other hand, a humanitarian approach that emphasises migrant suffering can victimise migrants and limit their capacity to act as agents. Both discursive frames are therefore limiting in their ability to engage with migrants' perspectives and their rights.

² This refers to a skilled immigration system whereby migrants are assessed on the basis of their potential contribution to the economy. Under this system, identified gaps in the economy are addressed by allowing workers with relevant skills to migrate and work in the country.

Taken together, these three papers offer a distinctively social *and* political psychological approach to the issue of the accommodation of migrants in national societies. To do this, they all stress the role of ideological themes that are part and parcel of everyday common sense (c.f. Billig et al., 1988) serving as cultural resources for making sense of and navigating intercultural encounters. These special issue papers alert us to the politics of immigration and force us to consider the political implications of social psychological work on this subject. In our view, they raise the following questions which can be addressed in further psychological research: How can we conceptualise and study the intersection between ‘big’ ideological themes and their psychological manifestations, for example in interpersonal relations in everyday life? What are the underlying ideological frames that shape people’s thinking about immigration? To what extent are these frames stable and habitual and to what extent, and how, might they change? What are the ideological foundations of specific policy approaches towards immigration, and how does political rhetoric manage to present them as ‘neutral’ solutions to sustainability issues?

(ii) Dialogical engagement with the ‘other’

The second facet of immigration that papers in this special issue address is the study of processes of dialogical engagement with the ‘other’ – the ‘other’ being understood here as an individual, a group, a community or another actor whose perspective is different from our own. Three papers (Kadianaki et al.; Sammut, Jovchelovitch, Buhagiar, Veltri, Redd & Salvatore; and Glăveanu & de Saint Laurent) bring a dialogical approach to the study of immigration. Emanating from sociocultural psychology (Linell, 2009; Marková, 2003) and social representations theory (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Gillespie, 2008), this dialogical approach criticises individualisation and de-contextualisation in psychology. It brings to the fore: a) the interdependency of self and other in the construction of knowledge and the development of self, b) an attention to the social context, and c) a focus on the content of representations and identification. All these three aspects are important in unpacking psychological dimensions of self-other relations in immigration contexts. Specifically, in all papers, the ideas that people hold about social others and the processes of relating to or blocking ideas of social others is meticulously exemplified.

Kadianaki et al. adopt a dialogical perspective in their analysis, examining how favourable and unfavourable media representations of migrants in Cyprus relate to each other. Their analysis focuses on the ways in which arguments in favour of migration engaged with arguments against immigration and vice-versa. Managing opposing arguments and alternative representations on immigration took the form of disclaimers, such as ‘I’m not racist, but’ for anti-immigration arguments, or the form of counter-arguments, for example arguing that migrants do indeed contribute to the economy despite concerns that they do not. While Kadianaki et al. find more ‘traces of dialogicality’ in pro-migration discourses, they conclude that engagement with other perspectives is severely limited in media discourse. This suggests that migration debates in this context remain superficial and polarising.

The paper by Sammut et al. presents findings from an interview study on representations of Arabs in Malta, a national context with widespread stigma against Arabs. Sammut et al.'s work brings together the study of argumentation, mostly studied by the discursive branch of social psychology, and the study of social representations, which has developed in parallel. Sammut et al. present a method for conducting argumentation analysis, which exemplifies the argumentative structure of social representations. This is a useful methodological tool for explicating how 'our' representations are argumentatively validated while 'other' representations are kept at bay.

The theme of dialogical engagement with perspectives of the 'other' continues with the theoretical paper of Glăveanu and de Saint Laurent, which focuses on perspective-taking and particularly on ways of taking the perspectives of refugees. These authors extend existing work on perspective-taking in sociocultural psychology by developing what they call the 'Commitment Model', a model of different types of perspective-taking based on whether perspective-taking is focused on similarity or difference and on person or situation. They use internet comments extracted from online discussions on refugees to illustrate four types of perspective-taking: identification ('If I was him or her'), repositioning ('If it happened to me'), essentialism ('People like this are'), and situationalism ('People in this situation are'). Importantly, Glăveanu and de Saint Laurent caution against assuming that perspective-taking based on similarity leads to tolerance and perspective-taking based on difference leads to discrimination. All types of perspective-taking can be used to promote both tolerance and intolerance towards social others, depending on the context. In efforts to improve dialogical engagement with social others, it is important, they suggest, that we are critical and reflective of the assumptions which anchor our perspectives.

We suggest that future research on the area of intergroup relations would benefit by such a dialogical perspective. This is because it brings a new perspective on contact, as this takes place within individuals, in their thought and talk, and identifies the meanings in which this contact is based. Questions that can be addressed through these lenses are: what are the representations that migrants and indigenous people hold about each other? How do these representations enable or restrict contact with each other? When and through which processes do people allow to be transformed by intercultural encounters or feel threatened and close down? These questions that can be applied in a multitude of contexts that intercultural contact takes place.

(iii) Perspectives of mobile people

Finally, the paper by Zittoun, Levitan and Cangiá brings a third thematic axis to this special issue. It differs from the other papers in that it studies the experiences of mobile people themselves. Although the perspective of migrants has been under systematic focus in the literature, Zittoun et al.'s study proposes several novel contributions. First, these authors frame their research as a study of mobility rather than immigration in order to move beyond a national frame of reference. Zittoun et

al. move beyond the prevalent methodological nationalism of approaching cultural diversity in terms of ethnicity and/or nationality, and they and make a convincing call for de-essentialising academic work on this topic. Second, instead of looking at immigration as a matter of individual mobility from one national point to another, their case study focuses on a mobile family in Switzerland and studies their experiences of repeated mobility. We suggest that future research delves further on the experiences of people involved in what are often considered as unconventional patterns of immigration. Additionally, we suggest that research delves more into the relation that migrants establish with their countries of origin after their immigration, whether this is expressed through physical visits or mediated contact. So far research on return immigration has focused more systematically on this relationship, showing changes on representations, emotions and identity (e.g. Tsuda, 2000). However, the ongoing relationship of migrants with their countries of origin while abroad is a field that deserves more systematic focus (e.g. Graham & Khosravi, 1997; Muggerridge & Doná, 2006).

Adopting a sociocultural approach, Zittoun Levitan and Cangiá approach immigration as a transition, which can be examined by looking at what the authors call 'spheres of experience', which can be individual (such as the school life of the children or the workplace for the parent) and overlapping between family members (such as family activities around food, games and music). These overlapping spheres of experience, according to Zittoun, Levitan and Cangiá, can act as important resources in transitions offering emotional and relational support to family members. Future research can identify the individual and collective resources on which migrants build to support the changes that immigration brings. What are the social networks (local as well as transnational), the practical (e.g. cultural centers, social networking technologies) or symbolic resources (e.g. music, literature; Zittoun, 2006), which people develop and employ to respond to the various ruptures that immigration might induce (e.g. Kadianaki, 2014)? What kinds of resources are these and how are they different in different spheres of life (e.g. work, home, school etc.)? Such research would bring to the fore the multifacetedness of migrant experiences. It would also highlight the often overlooked agency of migrants and could help practitioners of the field build appropriate interventions.

Psychology and human mobility: final thoughts and ways forward

The papers of this special issue adopt and develop approaches that are socially situated, dynamic and critical. The discursive, social representations, dialogical and sociocultural approaches that they bring forward share a number of core theoretical and methodological characteristics that we believe make an important contribution to the field. The papers show ways forward for the field in four ways. They exemplify: firstly, the importance of understanding processes rather than states; secondly, the value of studying discursive practices but also moving beyond discourse to advance methodological pluralism; thirdly, the need to engage with multiple perspectives and understand how they relate to each other; and fourthly,

they challenge us to unsettle taken-for-granted categories such as us/them, migrants/locals, nationals/foreigners.

First of all, the special issue papers start from the obvious, but much neglected point that mobility should be at the core of theoretical and methodological work in the field. This means studying processes of transitions rather than discrete stages that are seen as frozen in specific times and contexts. Immigration research in psychology has too often examined immigration as a linear transition from one country to another and has described experiences of immigration in terms of states of acculturation or attitudes towards migrants. The special issue papers, on the contrary, adopt a '**processual approach**' towards the study of immigration, which acknowledges the open-ended nature of migrant transitions: for example, processes of argumentation in everyday interaction and processes of engaging with perspectives that differ from our own.

Secondly, all papers emphasize the importance of **discourse** as well as the need to move beyond it. Discourse is studied both as expressive of ideas about social others but also as performative of actions towards them. Specifically, discourse is shown to be central in understanding different dimensions of the relations between self and other, namely, the processes through which people engage with the ideas of social others, understand their perspectives and manage their presence (i.e. inclusion/exclusion) in contexts of immigration. The papers presented here have engaged with various forms of discourse, from media and commentaries, to discourse produced as part of interview settings. As a sign of the **methodological pluralism** needed in the field, papers in the special issue also integrate more ethnographic observational techniques and visual methods with discursive analyses. Using multiple data sources is a way to take the field forward. This could mean studying visual data or getting involved in observational research of people's experiences and behaviors in their environments.

Third, this special issue brings forward the importance of the concept of **perspective**. At one level, the papers do so by studying the 'space between' perspectives, by studying, that is, the processes of encountering and engaging with the perspectives of social others. Beyond this however, the studies included in the special issue also stress the value of studying multiple perspectives in relation to the issue of immigration and mobility more generally. We can understand this as a type of triangulation of perspectives, which rather than producing a definitive consensual understanding, can be helpful in illustrating the complexity of the issue (Parker, 2004). In our view, it is crucial to study the diverse perspectives of the different actors involved in processes of immigration. This involves the perspectives of different communities of 'the public', including migrants themselves, across different contexts (such as schools, see Figgou & Baka, and the sphere of family and home, see Zittoun, Levitan & Cangia). It also involves political stakeholders who have decision and policy making power and/or power to shape the political agenda, such as in the case of UKIP in Britain (Gibson & Booth). The media are also an important social and political actor. This includes conventional print media (Kadianaki et al.)

and social media (Glăveanu & de Saint Laurent), whose role in social life and politics is increasingly important but not sufficiently considered in the social sciences.

Finally, the papers of this special issue **disrupt the categories that researchers in the field routinely take for granted**: us/them, migrants/locals, nationals/foreigners and so on. The papers treat these categories not as background context but as actively constructed representations that can be problematized and resisted. In a more or less explicit way, all papers take this idea as a starting point and are reflective of the political implications of these processes of construction for shaping immigration experiences and intercultural relations between 'us' and 'others'. Zittoun et al.'s paper provides a good illustration of this point. Their paper disrupts the assumption that immigration is solely an inter-national process of moving for good from one country (of the Global South for the most part) to another country (of the Global North for the most part). Their study draws attention to mobility as a broader phenomenon of sociocultural transition that is an 'ordinary' part of the lifecourse and can affect anyone, not just those who are considered as 'typical' migrants in immigration studies.

All in all, the papers of this special issue offer a methodologically plural, processual and critical analysis of human geographical mobility, which we hope will be of value to psychologists and other social scientists in the field.

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