

'The infrastructural turn in Asian migration'

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Introduction

During the past decade we have witnessed dramatic changes in how transnational migration across Asia and the Middle East is organized. Consider the rise of the mobile phone, the deregulation of the airline industry, the evolution of biometric technology, which all in different ways are reshaping communication, transportation, and surveillance in the context of migration. For instance, two decades ago the great majority of Indonesian migrants travelling from the island of Lombok to Malaysia to work on palm oil plantations or to Singapore as domestic servants would go overland via a complicated network of middlemen and different modes of transportation. Today most fly directly. When previously labor brokers wanted to get in touch with prospective migrants in rural villages, they would call a telephone office and someone would be sent to fetch the person in question. Today a text message will do.¹ In the case of low-skilled migration from China to the Japan, internet-based video conference was recently introduced for employers in Japan to test workers' skills. This not only save employers from international travels but more importantly enable them to interview more candidates across larger areas and adopt stricter criteria in selection.²

But this does not mean that the migration process has become easier for the migrants or the regulators. Along with the development of these technologies there has been a proliferation of commercial brokerage and government regulations across the region. More generally, labor migration in and from Asia is increasingly intensively mediated (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). For instance, in Indonesia documented international migrants are recruited by a series of licensed and unlicensed middlemen, are required to access a number of government documents, pass medical tests, are transported by a range of vehicles, inhabit different forms of temporary housing, and spend time in training centers prior to departure (Lindquist 2010). Furthermore, technological changes have not streamlined the regulation of migration. Sophisticated surveillance technologies do not simplify regulatory procedures. On the contrary, increasing numbers of visa categories and more complicated regulations have been introduced. The Singapore government for instance pigeonholes migrants into finely differentiated classificatory grids according to their nationality, skill level, occupation and sector of employment, each subject to different regulations. The Japanese regulation over labor migration (under the so-called "industrial trainee" programme) is so complicated that

¹ Lindquist's primary data from fieldwork in Lombok intermittently from 2007 until 2013.

² Xiang's primary data from fieldwork in northeast China 2004-2008, 2011.

at least 38 forms have to be filled up for applying for a visa, and even a professional labor recruiter in China has to spend more than USD 120 just to get all documents in order. Such regulations made labor migration in Asia into a form of “labor transplant”, namely migrants are extracted from their hometowns and inserted in a pre-designated foreign workplace with great precision; the journey between and the space beyond the two points are minimized in migrants’ experience (Xiang 2012). In sum the intensification of mediation in migration has ushered in an “arms race” between regulators and intermediaries who compete to control the migratory processes (Pieke and Xiang 2009). As such the complication of regulation has certainly not eradicate migrants' rights abuse or migration irregularities.

Behind these seemingly contradictory developments are three inter-related trends that collectively constitute what we call the infrastructural turn in Asian migration. First, taken together these developments call our attention to how migration is profoundly shaped by changes in infrastructure, broadly defined as a socio-technical platform for mobility (Larkin 2013). The transformations in the socio-technical means of mobility are so rapid that their effects on migration processes are probably more profound than any previous era. For instance biometric technologies have created an interface between individual identity, bodily characteristics and databases, thus shaping the basis for the increasingly individualized and precise regulation of migration. Irregular border crossing becomes much harder, and formal documentation much more important. As a result labor migration in Asia is very different from what it used to be: migrants enjoy safer journeys and fewer injuries, but have higher financial burdens; they face less physical risks, but are more socially constrained.

Second, Although mobility is always facilitated and mediated by a diverse range of actors, networks and technologies, the contemporary concentration and systematization of infrastructure is arguably unprecedented. When people travel overland in horsedrawn carts, for instance, the roads and vehicles are part of the local landscape, while those who facilitate or deter mobility are diverse and deeply embedded in local communities. By contrast when people travel by airplane, their mobility relies to a greater degree on a system managed by highly centralized and standardized professional bodies. Similarly, migrant networks that have historically primarily been extensions of familial and community relations have increasingly been replaced by specialist commercial middlemen. Migration infrastructure appears increasingly autonomous. More specifically, we have argued that labor migration from Asia is characterized by a process of ‘infrastructural involution’, in which the interplay between different dimensions of migration infrastructure make it self-perpetuating and self-

serving, thus impeding rather than enhancing people's migratory capabilities (Xiang and Lindquist 2014).

Third, migration infrastructure has increasingly become a focus of public attention and a key site of government regulation, particularly with regard to commercial middlemen and the rise of e-governance. Regulation has become 'infrastructural' in the sense that governments do not simply control the entry of particular individuals, but put in place systems that integrate different actors such as guarantors and employers, following procedures such as assessing each application by scoring against pre-set criteria, and forming transnational cooperation and bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries as well as private-public partnerships. This new policy attention to migration infrastructure should be understood in the context of the growing public and political concern with infrastructure, both as a site of spectacular economic and political investment and expansion and of grave concern in the wake of neoliberal reform (Boyer). Biometric technologies and surveillance systems point to new forms of bordering practices, the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank illustrates the expansive political force of infrastructure, and the repeated urban flooding of unprecedented scales illuminates the fragility of megacities . As a result there is a sense of urgency among policy makers across the world that they have to "get the infrastructure right".

While acknowledging the contingent, embedded, and patchwork nature of infrastructure, and the distributed forms of agency, we claim that the autonomy—not in sense of existing and operating in isolation but in the sense of forming a driving force in its own right—of migration infrastructure calls for a particular form of conceptualization. Following from this, and as outlined in an earlier publication (Xiang and Lindquist 2014), we define migration infrastructure as the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility. For analytical purposes, we stipulate five dimensions of migration infrastructure: the commercial (recruitment intermediaries), the regulatory (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training and other purposes), the technological (communication and transport), the humanitarian (NGOs and international organizations), and the social (migrant networks). These five dimensions point to distinct logics of operation rather than discrete domains. For instance, commercial infrastructure functions by interacting with regulatory, humanitarian, social, and technological infrastructures. But in each dimension, the leading actors, the driving forces, the central strategies and rationalities, and the defining *modus operandi* differ. The five dimensions

collide with and contradict one another, and this deep entanglement is the key to understanding migration infrastructure. By defining migration infrastructure in this way we create a new space for analysis that engages with the intensifying mediation of migration, drawing attention away from a primary focus on social networks and the figure of the migrant and migration management or governance and a primary concern with the state.

In sum, the infrastructural turn is both a turn in migration patterns in and a turn in the policy and scholarly thinking about migration. Our focus on infrastructure follows primarily from a struggle to understand and conceptualize changes in migration on the ground, at the same time we hope that our attention to infrastructure will stimulate methodological innovation, broaden the intellectual horizon in migration studies, and link it more closely to broad intellectual and political debates. This chapter provides an overview on the notion of migration infrastructure as a result of a convergence between a history of migration and a history of idea. The chapter will begin by delineating the evolution of migration infrastructure in both a global and regional context. We will then discuss how an infrastructural perspective has been developed in social research in general and migration studies in particular. We conclude the article by highlighting the methodological and theoretical challenges and opportunities that the infrastructural turn may bring about in migration studies.

The Infrastructural Turn in History

The infrastructural turn in migration became evident in the 1990s, but in Asia its history can be traced further back. In fact, a historical and non-linear approach is critical in order to grasp the on-going developments in infrastructure.

Beginning around 1850 Asia witnessed what some scholars call a ‘mobility revolution’ (Amrith 2011) as large-scale labor migration from China and British India developed in response to the demand for natural resources in Asia in the wake of the industrial revolution and capitalist expansion. Migration was made possible by colonial intervention, most explicitly in relation to the circulation of coolies in the British empire, but also in China when the Qing court, after humiliating defeats in two opium wars, was forced to sign the Beijing Treaty in 1860 that conferred foreign companies the right to recruit workers primarily to Southeast Asia. The large-scale movements were also facilitated by transportation innovations such as the steamship, as well as temporary housing and labor depots (Kaur 2004: 51).

The prevalence of private recruitment brokers who facilitated the circulation of labor was of particular significance in this process. In China, colonial powers set up recruitment bureaus in key cities and dispatched officers to different parts of the country, who in turn relied on local brokers to recruit workers. As circular migration, or sojourning was a key feature of Asian migration (Amrith 2011: 4), migrants themselves frequently became brokers. In India, for instance, the use of return migrants was critical in both *kangani* and indentured recruitment (Carter 1992). Brokers linked previously separate societies, either between the colonial and the native, or between formal systems and informal social life, and made the actual recruitment and movement of labor across great distances possible.

In his work on the history of Asian migration, Adam McKeown (2008, 2012) has described the evolving international concern among lawmakers and reformers with regulating migration brokers and the infrastructure of mobility during the second half of the nineteenth century. This was 'part of a broader process of redefining forms of personal power and obligation, especially in the context of work relationships' (McKeown 2012: 22). More specifically, the decline of the Atlantic slave trade and European indenture in tandem with the increasing demand for labor supply over long distance led to a focus on improving the process of migration and recruitment, of which brokers were considered an integral part. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, with the rise of the 'free laborer' and the increasing focus on regulating migration at the border, the broker was increasingly associated with 'pre-modern' forms of labor control and demonized on an international scale, despite the fact that most were a product of the capitalist economies and mass migrations associated with modernity (McKeown 2008: 116). An emerging form of proceduralism based on documentation increasingly came to regulate mobility (ibid: chapter 10). While previously migration was conceptualized as a *process* that is facilitated by many actors who are in turn embedded in social relations of the migrant, proceduralism fixated on the migrant as the single subject to be examined and regulated by bureaucratic procedures and documents.

This form of proceduralism was evident, for instance, in the context of regulation of labor mobility within the Dutch East Indies in the early twentieth century, where the colonial state, while heavily reliant on brokers, was also keen to curtail them. While Recruitment Ordinances aimed to regulate labor recruitment through documentation, officials hoped that dactyloscopy, the science of fingerprint identification would form the basis for a modern labor system in the Indies through the registration and, as Dutch experts put it, the 'sieving' of

contract workers. Indeed, labor depots in Javanese port cities such as Semarang, where prospective coolies would transit, were the first places where fingerprint technology was implemented in the 1920s (Mrázek 2002: 101-2). The aim was that information connected with the photograph or fingerprint could be organized centrally and be accessed by concerned parties (Breman 1990: 45).

In relation to the focus on migration infrastructure, a few key points should be made with regard to nineteenth century migration and the transformations that took place around the turn of the twentieth century. First, the rise of long-distance migration in the wake of the mobility revolution was dependant on a form of infrastructure centered on steamships, housing, ports, treaties, government documentation and a wide range of brokers. Second, if we consider the expansion of border controls, the rise of proceduralism, and the demonization of brokers in infrastructural terms it is possible to highlight continuities rather than disjunctures in migration. In other words, although the globalization of border controls that developed around the turn of the twentieth century suggests a regime of migration, the importance of a range of licensed and unlicensed brokers, transport, and housing has remained critical in the mobility of migrants. Third, this focus on continuity allows for greater specificity with regard to the characteristics of contemporary forms of Asian migration. Private recruiters, in particular, have appeared critical in Asian 'plural societies' (Furnivall) in which people encounter one another in the market but remain embedded in culturally diverse communities.

If the period between 1850 and 1930 was the high point of Asian migration, the 1930s until the 1970s was a period of 'disconnection' in the wake World War II and decolonization (Amrith 2011: 89). By the 1970s, however, the rise of the Asian 'Tiger' and Middle Eastern oil economies created new opportunities and patterns of migration across an increasingly uneven landscape of economic development, which generated divisions between sending countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines and receiving countries such as Singapore and Saudi Arabia. Dramatic processes of urbanization and emerging class divisions created demands for both construction and care workers. In stark contrast to modernization theory, which formed the basis for earlier development models, low-skilled migration of women, in particular, and associated remittances, have been seen as a way forward for national development; thus signalling a significant transformation of values across the region and new forces for migration. These processes have come to intensify in the wake of the 1997 Asian economic crisis.

Migration across Asia and the Middle East since the 1970s has become characterized by state intervention, bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries, temporary contracts and return upon completion, increasingly multi-tiered visa systems, biometric technologies, the extensive use of private recruitment companies, medical certification, pre-departure training, and the rise of low-cost carrier airlines. Low-skilled migrants themselves generally have limited rights and are bound to one employer, most starkly in the case of the Middle Eastern *kafala* sponsorship. In other words, although there is no explicit migration system, there is a certain infrastructural form taking shape with shared elements.³ While commercial, regulatory, technological, and social dimensions are evident in these processes, NGOs and international organisations such as the International Organization for Migration are critical in supporting not only the rights of migrants but also their regularized return, thus in fact becoming a critical dimension of migration infrastructure. 'Protection' becomes a double-edged sword, because for a migrant to be protected, one has to be regulated in the first place

In relation to low-skilled international migration from China and Indonesia, this has more specifically led to a process of 'infrastructural involution' in which migration infrastructure has become self-perpetuating and self-serving, and thus to a certain degree autonomous. Clifford Geertz (1963) famously developed the concept of 'agricultural involution' to refer to how the intensification of labor inputs in Javanese wet-rice agriculture increased total production, but not per capita output, thus leading to rural stagnation, while Prasenjit Duara (1987, 1988) characterized the building of the modern Chinese state after the collapse of the Qing dynasty and before the establishment of the People's Republic as a process of 'state involution.' Unable to increase its administrative efficiency while losing the ability of social mobilization, the modernizing state relied on political brokerage to extract additional resources while largely losing control over them. In a fashion not dissimilar to what Geertz and Duara described, the development of migration infrastructure has turned migration into an

³ More generally, these changes are in line with a model of 'circular migration' that has moved to the top of the global policy agenda following influential reports by the Global Commission on International Migration (2005) and the International Organization for Migration (2005). (see also Vertovec 2007). In many ways the Asia-Middle East migration corridor has become a model circular migration based on an emerging system that preceded it. Importantly, there are clear continuities leading back to the mobility revolution of the nineteenth century. Most notably, private recruitment brokers remain critical in a wide range of context (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012).

object of intensive regulation, commodification and intervention, but has not necessarily enhanced people's migratory capability in terms of making independent decisions, exploring new paths, and cultivating transnational social relations. For instance, in both China and Indonesia the number of licensed recruitment companies has grown far more quickly than the number of migrants in proportional terms (Xiang and Lindquist 2014: S123). The volume and frequency of migration has not increased in proportion to the amount of resources and energy absorbed in the process of migration. It is in this process that we can understand the paradox of increasing levels of freedom and complication.

The intensification of mediation and infrastructural involution can be attributed to a dual development in the broader political economy: an increasing level of mobility due to the extension of market forces and the enhancement of state regulatory capacity. Migration infrastructure is particularly evident in Asia because both developments have acquired strong momentum in the region. Governments of both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries promote temporary labor migration that is placed under increasingly sophisticated regulations (Xiang, 2013a). In receiving countries, migration infrastructure in relation to low-skilled migration confines migrants to employers, prevents settlement, and enforces return (Xiang, 2012, 2013b; Lindquist, 2013). The overall tendency in Asia and the Middle East there is however to concentrate migration infrastructure on the sending side. Not only is migration infrastructure less elaborate on the receiving side, but it also increasingly relies on the sending side to achieve its goals, for instance through health certification and pre-departure training.

Thus, throughout history migration infrastructure has become ever more complicated, though it by no means followed a unilinear path. On the one hand, we observe a gradual differentiation within migration infrastructure. Strengthened state capacity and active government intervention create elaborate, supposedly coherent, systems of regulation; the increasing public awareness about migrants rights and the proliferation of NGOs, especially facilitated by social media in recent years, make humanitarian interventions in transnational migration a force of its own; and economic restructuring, particularly the multilayered labor outsourcing processes, also renders commercial infrastructure of migration ever more sophisticated. These different dimensions of infrastructure follow different logics and often pursue competing interest. On the other hand, there is the process of entanglement. Different dimensions of infrastructure are deeply intertwined. The regulatory infrastructure would not

function without others and vice versa. This is particularly evident in the case of temporary circular migration that is based on bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries has developed.

However we should not regard the complication of infrastructure as something inevitable or the current condition as a stable state of affairs. It would be incorrect to call this a system or regime because of the diversity of patterns and the lack of multilateral government engagement. We regard Asia and the Middle East as a laboratory for migration infrastructure. Laboratory suggests a form of evolving experimentation that offers insight into a system-in-the-making centered on forms of infrastructural developments. From this perspective, we may consider Asia and the Middle East as a model for how the regulation of migration may develop in other regions in the future

Reconceptualizing Migration

While firmly grounded in observations of empirical changes, our notion of migration infrastructure is also a continuation of existing academic attempts to broaden migration studies and part of an emerging interest in infrastructure in general social sciences. Dominant approaches to migration research—notably those focusing on social networks and migration management, the former taking relations between migrants as a starting point for analysis, and the latter focusing primarily on the state and international actors—offer limited guidance in conceptualizing contemporary forms of international migration across Asia and the Middle East (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Between these research traditions there is a lack of empirical knowledge and a dearth of analytical concepts for considering the mechanics of migration, ranging from processes of recruitment, modes of documentation, forms of transport, to technologies of surveillance.

Previously we identified the middle space of the migration process as the ‘black box’ of migration (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012). Black box, a term borrowed from science and technology studies, refers to devices or systems that are understood in terms of their input and output rather than according to their inner workings. We argued that in order to understand how contemporary forms of migration are shaped it is critical to pay attention to these inner workings in a sustained empirical manner and to develop appropriate analytical concepts. While there is a large body of research that focuses on why migrants leave home—usually

because of poverty, limited work opportunities, or dreams of modernity—or what happens upon arrival—they often lack basic rights and are poorly paid—we have limited knowledge of what happens in between.

Scholars of migration have increasingly recognized this process of black-boxing from a variety of perspectives. Historians have pointed out that brokers were increasingly vilified and pushed underground with the rise of liberalism (McKeown 2012), thus creating the basis for an enduring ethical binary, while social scientists have called for a shift of focus away from migrants and their families to the entrepreneurs that make migration possible; in other words, the migration industry (Hugo). More recently, scholars have broadened the concept of migration industry in order to highlight how ‘humanitarian’ interventions also need to be considered in empirical terms; thus leading to a focus on the so-called ‘rescue industry’ that includes NGOs and other kinds of actors that engage in counter-trafficking initiatives (Sorensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen 2013) and the ‘illegality’ industry that characterizes contemporary European engagement with undocumented migration across the Mediterranean Sea (Andersson 2014). From a different perspective, Feldman (2012) has developed the concept of migration apparatus in order to conceptualize how the figure of the migrant takes shape through the work of policymakers, while Neilson (2010) uses logistics as a critical entry-point for conceptualizing labor circulation.

All these approaches have in different ways attempted to develop alternative approaches to mainstream migration studies while avoiding the ethical binaries that characterize contemporary debates surrounding the figure of the migrant as either victim or perpetrator. This binary has become exceedingly obvious in contemporary Europe, but is equally evident across Asia and the Middle East, not least with regard to discussions concerning human trafficking or contemporary forms of slavery or nationalist xenophobia. In other words, this suggests a shift of attention away from the dichotomy between the figure of the migrant and the all-encompassing power of the state to a focus on how migration is always mediated, albeit on different levels and from different perspectives. All these approaches, however, appear unsatisfactory in relation to empirical changes taking place across Asia and the Middle East. Migration industry construes migration as a form of business rather than, for instance, considering how brokers also deal with various components of infrastructure that have regulatory effects, while migration apparatus, in turn, focuses on governmental operations and policymakers. In contrast, migration infrastructure, as we define it, highlights a broader range

of dimensions and logics of operation that we argue are critical in describing and conceptualizing contemporary forms of migration.

Our attention to migration infrastructure is also informed by a widely acknowledged infrastructural turn in the social sciences (Larkin 2013, Harvey et al. 2017). In contrast to conceptualising infrastructure as the underlying material basis upon which modern society operates (Edwards), recent scholarship influenced by science and technology studies has come to acknowledge that infrastructure cannot be approached strictly in technological terms but rather as co-evolving socio-technical systems (Jensen and Wintereik 2013, Larkin 2013), or even more broadly as 'technologically mediated, dynamic forms that continuously produce and transform socio-technical relations' (Harvey et al. 2017: 8).

While scholars such as Harvey, Jensen and Morita (2017: 23), following the lead of Latour and others, attempt to disturb a holistic understanding of infrastructure by focusing attention on 'gaps, interstices and zones of opacity' rather than flows, thus highlighting the fragility and uncertain boundaries of infrastructure, our aim is to clarify a conceptual model. Although we do not deny that migration infrastructure is instable, patchwork, has 'splintering' or recursive effects (Graham and Marvin 2001, Harvey, Jensen and Morita 2017: 20), or generates distributed forms of agency that allow migrants to develop alternative tactics or brokers to reroute migrants, it is critical to highlight that migrants are increasingly and generally mobilized along particular routes. Highlighting gaps rather than the mechanisms that make mobility possible runs the risk of drawing attention away from the broader analytical and political issues that are at the center of contemporary international migration.

Conclusion

The infrastructural turn in Asian migration means that migration infrastructure has become a significant shaping force of migration, a subject of government regulation, and a subject of academic inquiry on its own right since the 1990s. Thus the turn is simultaneously an empirical change and an epistemological shift. The double nature of the turn differs it from most recent literature on infrastructure. In one of the early discussion on infrastructure, Star (1999) stressed that infrastructure is largely a matter of perspective. As infrastructure is always there and often hidden, it is only through a particular lens that it becomes visible and can be problematized. Larkin (2012: 338) further points out that any discussion of

infrastructure is a categorical act since the embedded nature of infrastructure means that it is difficult to mark a beginning or an end to its existence. It follows that methodology is contingent and that identifying a methodological approach to infrastructure become a theoretical problem (see also Harvey, Jensen and Morita 2017), that is, there can be no standard methods to be used to study infrastructure, and how we perceive infrastructure is always contingent to our specific theoretical question at hand. Migration infrastructure is however not only a perspective that will help to "rediscover" what has always been there but we failed to see, but also a new reality that demands new research approach. Migration infrastructure is no longer hidden that becomes visible only when it breaks down; it is what the migrants and the regulators have to face all the time.

As such, the relation between the methodological and the theoretical may be less complex than in other cases. Empirical reality provides a firm common ground for both. For future studies on migration infrastructure, we should develop methods that will capture the actual workings of infrastructure accurately. For instance we may follow forms, by examining how form is designed, handed out, filled out by whom on whose behalf, how it travels, and comes to shape migration and its relation to other dimensions of social life (cf. Hull 2012). We may also compare how different migration policies have generated different infrastructural configurations. But empirical documentation about infrastructure alone is not enough. We are in the end of day not interested in migration infrastructure per se, but take migration infrastructure as a point of entry to examine larger questions. It is only with questions of intellectual and political urgency that a point of entry can lead us somewhere. For instance it may not be particularly useful to point out that the infrastructure of highly skilled migration differs from that of the low-skilled. But it can be revealing to analyze how the infrastructural difference results in the differentiated social positioning of migrants, and therefore to identify specific points of actions for policy makers and NGOs that will empower migrants in actual life.

Migration infrastructure urges us to collect information at two levels simultaneously. First, we need to examine migration as quotidian and processual operations: how, for instance, a, how migrants are transported from one location to another (Walters). Migration is determined neither by autonomous markets, policy logic, nor according to individual migrant agency, but is rather constituted by a multitude of activities, practices, and technologies that must be considered in specific contexts. Migration infrastructure provides a framework that offers analytical order to these activities without assigning them to pre-given categories.

Second, we need to think relationally across the commercial, the regulatory, the social, the humanitarian, and the technological. We delineate the process of infrastructural involution—the intensification of migration infrastructure that does not expand people’s migratory capabilities—as an example of how the interplay between different aspects of migration infrastructure becomes a central force in conditioning migration flows. This explains the phenomenon that low-skilled labor has become both more accessible and more complicated in China and Indonesia. More generally, it is critical to approach migration infrastructure as historically contingent. Understanding the role of the broker in contemporary migration, for instance, demands a deep historical understanding of migration and brokerage across the region.

But migration infrastructure should neither be analytically constricted to low-skilled migration nor to sending countries. Research on student or marriage migration (Collins, Yeoh) highlight comparable dynamics to low-skilled migration while reception countries as diverse as Australia and Saudi Arabia will clearly generate different relationships between the various dimensions of migration infrastructure. More specifically, this raises questions concerning migrant agency in the context of these various socio-technical assemblages. While we have highlighted the autonomy of migration infrastructure with regard to migrant agency in the context of low-skilled migration, it would not be surprising if other forms of migration offered greater forms of empowerment to migrants. More generally, however, in the context of migration infrastructure, it is important to highlight the distributed nature of agency, which will be evident not only with regard to migrants, but also brokers, bureaucrats and other actors.

Migration infrastructure is applicable to other regions though it is likely to assume different configurations in each context. Migration between ‘Fortress Europe’ and African sending

countries, for instance, could well be reconceptualized not primarily in terms of the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean, or the material production of the border dividing them, but more broadly through the creation of infrastructural forms that follow from the export of funding, technology, training, expertise from Europe, often under the guise of development aid (Andersson 2014; see also Feldman, 2011). Once we focus less on the movement of migrants and more on how they are moved by others, it becomes apparent that Europe is not passively receiving a supposedly unstoppable human tide, but is actively reconfiguring regional relations through migration infrastructure. Migration infrastructure as an analytical perspective will thus shed important light on how new geopolitics emerges in the process of migration (e.g. Thiollet 2011, Natter 2013). Detailed examination of the internal working of migration infrastructure is meant to reveal how social changes such as state-led market-oriented Chinese reform and post-Suharto economic and political transformation in Indonesia are taking place on the ground, each following multiple logics and rationalities simultaneously. Future research that compares different configurations and dynamics of migration infrastructure (e.g., by testing how applicable infrastructural involution is across contexts), refines the statistical and ethnographic measurements about the intensification of mediation, and explains the uneven distribution of migration infrastructure across space and scales, may well help develop migration studies into a field where new insights into general social change emerge.

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