

Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany – processes of inclusion and participation in the context of so-called irregular migration

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How does the life of migrants from West Africa and Syria in Germany differ from that of such migrants in Brazil? To what extent is their situation influenced by their own collective history and biography, and to what extent by the fact that Brazil is a country that defines itself in terms of immigration, in contrast to Germany, which defines itself as being rather opposed to immigration? Do immigrants in Brazil experience relations with different groupings of established citizens differently from immigrants in Germany? To answer these questions, we will reconstruct the collective and biographical histories of people from West Africa and Syria who have been living in Germany or in Brazil for a number of years. Our main focus will be on those migrants who are generally labelled as “irregular” or “unplanned” in the dominant social discourses, and on how processes of inclusion and participation differ in Brazil and Germany. Our intention is to analyse how people settle in very different lifeworlds and in different official and social contexts. We will need to take into account that the process of migrating to Brazil was probably less difficult than the process of migrating to Europe, and that obtaining permission to reside and work is easier for immigrants in Brazil than it is in Europe. Indeed, many migrants who manage to enter the European Union are described as “illegal”, while people who overstay their visas are illegalized and their residence status may remain unclear for a long time. A central aim of the planned study is to conduct empirical research into these differences and their consequences for the migrants concerned. We will ask which social and biographical constellations before, during and after migration determine biographical courses that make it easier or more difficult for migrants to become established and participate in the social life of the destination country. By comparing different groupings of migrants, different migration courses, and different present situations, we plan to show to what extent the present life of the migrants is determined by: a) their collective and biographical courses in the contexts of origin, b) their migration processes, c) their new lifeworlds, and, especially, d) opportunities for inclusion and participation in the destination country.

In addition to biographical case reconstructions based on biographical-narrative interviews (some of which were conducted in the context of earlier projects with migrants who had recently crossed the border), we plan to study biographical courses over a long period with follow-up interviews and group discussions on the present life of the migrants.