Public Lecture

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Thursday, 24 September 2020
Hostile Environments: The History and Consequences of Deterrence as Migration Control

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Prof. Michael Collyer, University of Sussex

Discussant: Lisa Marie Borrelli, University of Neuchâtel

18:15 – 19:45 h
Location: University of Neuchâtel, Avenue du 1er-Mars 26, Room C46.

The Public Lecture will be streamed online on the nccr – on the move YouTube channel.
Abstract
As UK Home Secretary, Theresa May determined that the creation of a ‘hostile environment’ should become an explicit objective of the UK migration policy. This has become shorthand for a particular approach to migration control, although far from originating in 2013, the idea has become part of political orthodoxy in migration control around the world over the past few decades. This includes approaches to contain or ‘warehouse’ refugees and those to prevent access to wealthier states as well as control of migrants once they have reached particular territories. These policies must fulfill a contradictory set of objectives. Harming migrants who have already arrived is not the principal aim of these policies, indeed in some cases, it must be explicitly avoided. The logic of the hostile environment is to reassure public opinion that action is being taken and deter future migrants who have yet to arrive or even leave. The policies are therefore targeted at the unknowable figure of the potential migrant. The contradictory objectives and uncertain focus of the hostile environment mean that it is inevitably poorly targeted and unintended consequences are common. These include the displacement of migrants to increasingly dangerous routes, the filtering of migrants, so that profiles change and immobility, ensuring many other remain in uncertain conditions elsewhere, in addition to the development of a more toxic environment, which may start to deter those migrants who are considered to be more desirable. The response to this hostility is weak and uncertain but may be seen in the growing attention to practices of sanctuaries.

Curriculum Vitae
Michael Collyer is a political geographer with an interest in the relationships between people on the move and state institutions. His research is particularly focusing on situations where that relationship is problematic, as it is for forced or undocumented migrants. In 2012-13 he was Fulbright Scholar at the University of Washington in Seattle and in 2015-16 he was Visiting Professor at the University of Wellington, New Zealand. He has also held visiting positions at Universities in Egypt, Morocco, and Sri Lanka. He regularly undertakes consultancies for UN agencies, the European Commission and national governments. His research has been funded by a range of organizations and he currently directs Migrants on the Margins, the Royal Geographical Society’s flagship Field Research Programme. His most recent books are Migration (2017) in Routledge’s Key Introductions to Geography series (with Michael Samers) and the edited volume Emigration Nations. The Politics and Policies of Emigrant Engagement (Palgrave, 2014). He is on the steering committee of Sanctuary on Sea, an umbrella group of refugee and migrants’ rights organizations in Brighton

Selected Publications