



Public Lecture Series

Thursday 11 December 2025

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Beyond Freedom of Movement: Rethinking Migration and Citizenship through the Right to Homeland

Cenk Saraçoğlu, Ankara University

Discussant: Jean-Thomas Arrighi, University of Neuchâtel, nccr – on the move

16:15 – 17:45 CET

This talk will be held at the University of Neuchâtel, Av. du Premier-Mars 26, Room D71 and on [Webex](#).

Abstract

In his influential 2010 intervention, Nicholas De Genova posed a foundational question for critical migration studies: if freedom of movement is truly an "elementary" human freedom, why has it received so little theoretical attention? His answer centered on the coercive architectures of sovereignty and citizenship, which he characterized as "devices for entrapment" that legitimize border regimes and deportability.

More than fifteen years later profound transformations in the global conjuncture demand that we revisit this framework and interrogate its limitations. Three interconnected dynamics have fundamentally altered the landscape of forced displacement and migration

First, authoritarianism has become a visible and growing tendency within Western metropolitan countries themselves. Nativism and right-wing populism have become central features of political life in Europe and North America, reshaping governance and citizenship itself. These developments blur the line between migrant and citizen, redefining who is entitled to belong and compelling a renewed interrogation of migration not merely as cross-border movement but as a crisis of political membership.

Second, ecological devastation has intensified to the point where it directly and systematically displaces populations. This is not a future scenario but a present reality, fundamentally challenging our understanding of what refugeehood means.

Third, extractivism, the violent appropriation of land, resources, and livelihoods has accelerated globally. From land grabs for agribusiness in Latin America to mining operations in Africa and Asia, to urban clearances in the name of development, extractivist processes systematically deprive people of their means of subsistence and sever their connections to the places where they live and labor.

Together, these transformations reveal that the foundational problem underlying refugeehood is not primarily the restriction of movement but a multi-faceted dispossession: the breach of people's capacity to remain in, shape, and belong to the places they call home. Refugeehood, in this light, emerges as the denial of what I call the "right to homeland," the collective capacity of people to determine the present and future of the land where they live and labor. Importantly, the very dynamics that erode this right have also begun to permeate the lives of those who formally possess citizenship. While differing in form and intensity, similar processes of dispossession increasingly structure the everyday experience of citizens themselves.

The concept of the right to homeland draws on two intellectual traditions. First, it extends Henri Lefebvre's and David Harvey's notion of the "right to the city" beyond the urban scale. Second, it draws inspiration from Ernst Bloch's conception of Heimat in *The Principle of Hope*, not as an ethnically bounded possession, but an ongoing capacity of people to build and rebuild the worlds they inhabit through collective struggle.

In this talk, I will develop this framework through two empirical foundations. First, I draw on six years of fieldwork with Syrian refugees in Turkey, tracing how dispossession persists across borders and reproduces itself through precarious labour. Second, I build on my long-term engagement with social movements in Turkey and beyond, observing how citizens articulate parallel experiences of political alienation and the loss of collective agency.

Taken together, these empirical and theoretical insights invite us to move beyond De Genova's focus on freedom of movement and to advance the notion of the right to homeland, conceived both as a normative horizon of collective freedom and as an epistemological standpoint from which to interrogate not only the global migration regime but also the contemporary forms of domination that underpin it.

Bio

Cenk Saraçoğlu is Professor of Sociology at Ankara University, Faculty of Communication. He received his PhD in Sociology from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. His research explores migration, nationalism, urban transformation, and class relations in contemporary Turkey through a social and political theory perspective that highlights the interplay between political power, class relations, and ideological formations. His work has appeared in journals such as *Critical Sociology*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Mediterranean Politics*, *Nations and Nationalism*, and *Population, Space and Place*. He is the author of *Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society* (I.B. Tauris, 2011).