

THIRD ANNUAL BUCERIUS YOUNG SCHOLARS FORUM HISTORIES OF MIGRATION: TRANSATLANTIC AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Workshop held on October 21-23, 2019 at the Pacific Regional Office of the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI PRO) at the University of California, Berkeley. Made possible by a grant from the ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucorius. Conveners: Levke Harders (GHI / Bielefeld University), Andrea Westermann (GHI PRO). Participants: Cristian Cercel (University of Bochum); Sheer Ganor (GHI PRO); Vera Kallenberg (UC Santa Cruz); Armin Langer (Humboldt University Berlin), Darshana Sreedhar Mini (USC, Los Angeles); Brianna Nofil (Columbia University); Thiago Pinto Barbosa (Free University Berlin); Christoph Rass (University of Osnabrück); Katherine Reed (University of Manchester); Isabel Richter (UC Berkeley); Chelsea Schields (UC Irvine); Alexander Schwanebeck (University of Cologne); Bill Sharman (Duke University).

How do we deal with the unpredictability of the past in fictional and historical writing? Author Katja Petrowskaja raised this question during the Third Annual Bucorius Lecture at the GHI Pacific Regional Office at the University of California Berkeley. She explored the topic in her conversation with literary scholar Sven Spieker (UC Santa Barbara) about her book *Maybe Esther*, whose English translation was published last year. The ideas and topics discussed that evening gained momentum as participants of the Young Scholars Forum carried them over into the two-day workshop on “Histories of Migration.” The forum brought together scholars from Germany, the United States, and other countries. It assembled a broad range of interdisciplinary migration research. The papers engaged with all forms of migration flows, from deportation and expulsion to labor migration, circular migration, or illegal border crossings in the twentieth century.

The workshop started with a panel on “Migrant Knowledge: Race as Category.” Chelsea Schields analyzed the Dutch state’s growing preoccupation with Caribbean families at the nexus of two historical developments: decolonization and the retrenchment of the European welfare state. She argued that knowledge production centering on race, sexuality, and kinship intensified after the end of empire and shaped key social policies in the 1970s-90s, thus even increasing racial inequality in the structures of the decolonizing state. Thiago

Pinto Barbosa asked how the transnational movements of social scientist Irawati Karve shaped her production of anthropological knowledge about human difference. Her translocational positionality — an Indian elite woman educated in Germany — cannot be separated from her knowledge outputs. Barbosa showed that the “peripheral” can be especially insightful for the articulation of critical knowledge. The comments by William Sherman and Vera Kallenberg pointed out that both cases deal with the production of scientific racialized knowledge, while at the same time “race” was replaced with cultural arguments since the 1960s.

The next session was dedicated to “Transnational Lives and Knowledge.” Darshana Sreedhar Mini explored the emergence of ethical and empathetic modes of transnationality in the specific context of low-budget films showing migrations from the South Indian state of Kerala to the Gulf region, mapping transnational journeys. Through a combined analysis of these short films, literature, search for missing migrants, bureaucratic policies and ethnographic vignettes, she explored the figure of the migrant laborer as both a social force and a media object around which ideas of justice and empathy cohere. Vera Kallenberg is working on a biography of women’s historian Gerda Lerner (1920-2013). In her paper, she focused on Lerner’s screenplay “Black Like Me” (1964). The film reflected her own persecution in Nazi Europe, political repression under McCarthyism, socialization in the Old Left, and commitment to the civil rights movement and the tradition of European literature and radicalism. Kallenberg conceptualized Lerner’s women’s historiography as intersectional *avant la lettre*. The comments by Alexander Schwanebeck and Thiago Pinto Barbosa centered on language issues: how did the migrants studied deal with the new language/s they had to learn? And how do we as researchers handle the range of languages in the source material? The discussion also posed questions about ethics and empathy: why is the latter so present when researching migration and minorities?

“Borders, borderlands, and other boundaries” was the title of the last panel of the first day. Brianna Nofil examined how the U.S. immigration service relied on northern New York jails to incarcerate new categories of excludable and deportable migrants crossing the U.S.-Canada border in the 1910s and 1920s. She analyzed that the frustrations of border communities whose jails were overcrowded by “immigration prisoners” was a key catalyst in the development of the first federal jails, and the 1930 creation of the Bureau of Prisons.

Alexander Schwanebeck analyzed contemporary U.S. history museums representing Black Seminoles' perspectives on U.S.-Mexican border regions from the mid-nineteenth century to the early 1900s. Schwanebeck showed how they can display borderlands and make marginalized voices heard in a postcolonial perspective. Commentators Katherine Reed and Cristian Cercel focused on the importance of counter-narratives in migration research, as did the discussion.

The workshop's second day began with a session on "Transatlantic Emigrations." Katherine Reed examined detained migrants' graffiti from Ellis Island immigration station in New York c. 1900-1924, combining social history with an archaeology of the present approach. A counterpoint to official mark-making and bureaucracy, this fragmentary source material provides an insight into the perceptions and emotions of people held in the limbo of immigration detention. She argued that writing and drawing functioned as coping strategies in this precarious and disorienting environment. Cristian Cercel discussed the Danube Swabian postwar migrations to La Roque-sur-Pernes (France) and Entre Rios (Brazil). He paid attention to the different ways of "Europeanization" both settlements constructed and asked whether the idea to focus on "Germans abroad" is/was underpinned by ideological pan-Germanism. Comments by Brianna Nofil and Armin Langer dealt, on the one hand, with Ellis Island as a liminal space and the wide-ranging histories the graffiti convey. How do we deal with these archaeologically preserved but spotty inscriptions of migrant knowledge that only represent a small fraction of all the experiences that were shaped in this immigration station? Participants then went on to debate citizenship and nationality more broadly: how can we define Germanness or Frenchness?

The last panel, on "Knowing Germany," included Armin Langer's project on Berlin's 2005 neutrality law, which prohibits religious symbols in public office buildings. Langer highlighted that a notion of religion separating belief from symbols and rituals was a historically Protestant concept and that the law must be seen in the tradition of Enlightenment philosophers' criticism of Jewish rituals. William Sharman's paper examined the social and intellectual worlds of "Third-World" refugees in 1970s and 80s West Germany. It argued that many refugees created the means to migrate through political, family, and religious networks. Once in West Germany, asylum seekers used poetry, activism, feminism, and documentary filmmaking to upend popular stereotypes, state knowledge, and humanitarian

conceptions about who they were. Both the discussion and the comments by Chelsea Schields and Darshana Sreedhar Mini stressed that a re-negotiation of German culture was necessary. Moreover, the question whether “predicament” be used as a concept in migration history was raised.

The lively, highly stimulating discussion fed by brilliant ideas and generous comments over two days made clear that migration studies has developed into a burgeoning field, and that “migration” is increasingly conceptualized as a cross-sectional research category. Collectively, the participants explored what historiography would look like if the categories of migrant or migration would be part and parcel of its fundamental vocabulary. While the papers focused either on migrants as actors or on the state and institutions, they never lost sight of the other dimension, thus revealing the multilayered history of knowledge production on migration. These distinctive perspectives (let us call them biographical or structural) require different source material. Some researchers need to build their own archives using film and (social) media, oral history, etc. Others read the existing archives against the grain. From a history of knowledge perspective, the group discussed the epistemological dimensions underlying and guiding, maybe unconsciously so, actors’ efforts in understanding their world and acting on it. The ethics and politics of research were a recurrent topic of debate as was the relevance of decentering archives and knowledge production.

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