

ARCHIVES OF MIGRATION: ANNUAL ACADEMIC AND POLICY SYMPOSIUM “INNOVATION THROUGH MIGRATION”

Workshop held at the Pacific Regional Office of the German Historical Institute Washington in Berkeley (GHI PRO), December 9–10, 2019, in cooperation with the Goethe-Institut San Francisco. Made possible by a grant from the Brüderstiftung. Conveners: Fatima El-Tayeb (University of California, San Diego) and Andrea Westermann (GHI PRO). Participants: Joanna Brooks (San Diego State University); Yasemin Yıldız (UC Los Angeles); Khatharya Um (UC Berkeley); Daniel Necas (University of Minnesota Libraries); Sandra Vacca (Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland, Köln); Robert Irwin (UC Davis); Paul Burnett (Oral History Center, UC Berkeley Library); Deniz Göktürk (UC Berkeley); S. Deborah Kang (California State University San Marcos); Dan Thy Nguyen (European Migration Knowledge Archive, Hamburg), Mervete Bobaj (Filmmaker and Activist, Berlin); Leslie Quintanilla (San Francisco State University), Katharina Hering (GHI Washington).

This symposium discussed the connection of migration, knowledge, and archives in historical perspective and brought the invited professionals into (hopefully lasting) contact. Structured around the larger theme of archives of migration, the symposium explored the role of knowledge transmission at the intersections of art, activism, education, media production, policy development, and academia. While the focus of migration studies and policies often is on knowledge production, here, participants highlighted how knowledge, once collected, is preserved and made accessible (or not). We explored the relationship between dominant and marginalized forms of knowledge, the role of material and cultural resources in creating and maintaining archives, and the tension between national and transnational narratives of migration. We were also interested in processes of interpretation and re-interpretation. As with other archives, the materials assembled in archives of migration lend themselves to ever new projects of (historical) sense-making and world-making.

The focus on archives of migration seems relevant in light of recent developments that urgently require innovative approaches, yet tend to replicate failed models. The European refugee crisis for example, provoked a cycle of reactions in Germany, from *Willkommenskultur* to the rapid success of anti-immigrant movements and parties; cycles

that played out in strikingly similar patterns as compared to the early 1990s, shortly after the German unification and the end of the Cold War. Also, the acknowledgement that marginalized knowledges need to be included in policy decisions, education models, and outreach efforts seems to be arrived at laboriously and then forgotten again in predictable generational cycles. In response to this observation, the symposium did not only explore the innovations gained through migration, but also inquired into how these insights can be presented and preserved in a manner that allows them to have lasting, if changing impact.

The introductory round set the tone. Linking personal engagement and intellectual work has become an experience that most academic participants had not sought from the outset but that had imposed itself as one way to respond to and make sense of the political present. It became obvious that many participants have recently felt compelled to wear two hats simultaneously that are often difficult to keep neatly separated: the hat of academic teacher, scholar, and artist and the hat of engaged citizen actively involved in the everyday politics of U.S. and European migration policies. The format of the workshop, which did not include formal academic papers but rather encouraged intellectual interventions based on collective experiences and individual trajectories through academic and political lives, proved to be invigorating. New strategies to make oneself heard in the closely-knit circles of policy advisors were but one recurrent topic.

The first panel, called “Bodies/Archives of Migrant Knowledge,” started out from the well-established idea that archives are not only repositories of collective knowledge but also sites of knowledge production. It explored what this means for the contested field of migration. Joanna Brooks described the background of “Allies to End Detention,” a local grassroots organization created by San Diego residents who came together to take action against the inhumane treatment of migrants and human rights violations at the U.S.-Mexican border, specifically the San Diego and Tijuana border less than twenty miles from San Diego. The group managed to overcome its impression that you cannot do anything about the border situation by corresponding with the people detained there, who come from around the world (the key was in obtaining people’s names). Letter-writing turned out to be a rather low-threshold, energizing strategy. The Otay Mesa Detention Center, operated by Core Civic, a private prison company, is near the border. The group was encouraged by the

response from migrants incarcerated there. In the letters, people tell about their lives, injustices and poor conditions at the facility. Such practices of “small batch humanity” are particularly important since much of the support for migrants at the U.S. Mexican border is carried out by small, local groups. Big international organizations — like the UN — are largely absent. Joanna discussed the close collaboration with the university archives and their staff, who preserve the letters and make them accessible to the public through SDSU institutional repository (<https://library.sdsu.edu/detainee-letters-donate>). In collaboration with lawyers, they have developed a solid review and redaction process to ensure that the publicized information does not include personally identifiable information and to mitigate risks in the asylum process. They have also developed protocols of dealing with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), if the original materials (sealed for 100 years) should be subpoenaed. The U.S. Postal Service proved to be a reliable venue to establish and maintain contact. The discussion addressed issues such as balancing advocacy with faculty responsibility and the importance of community and institutional support.

Yasemin Yildiz discussed her book in progress (with Michael Rothberg), “Citizens of Memory: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance,” which explores how memory regimes and migration regimes interact. Yasemin is interested in memory work by Germany-based immigrant writers, artists, and activists relating to National Socialism, the Holocaust, and World War II. She is assembling a new archive of materials, or, to put it slightly differently, is making existing sources newly visible. She discussed the significance of personal encounters in the creation of migrant archives, and the mobile, procedural nature of archives. Yasemin, like the artists among the group, in particular, highlighted the ways in which literature can act as a form of archive (condensation through poetization, clear-sighted, accurate depiction of social reality through fiction, etc). She also highlighted the fundamental difference between archival projects firmly tied to today’s emergency moments of migration and detention as opposed to the more slowly, inconspicuously accruing archives of guest workers. Historical contingency and contextualization make any attempt at generalization of what “archives of migrations” are difficult.

Katharya Um, one of the founders of the Critical Refugee Studies Collective (<https://criticalrefugeestudies.com>), discussed the importance of material culture in transmitting memories of the Cambodian

genocide, and the displacement in the diaspora. We have to expand the notion of “archive,” she argued, if we want to capture the traumatic memories of the survivors and document Cambodian displacement. In the Cambodian case of oral knowledge traditions, the killing of a whole generation means extinction of knowledge and memory. Traditional embroidery techniques go hand in hand with the retrieval of design content (motives) as media and elements of story-telling. This non-textual and non-photographic form may be the reason why the Cambodian genocide (one fourth of the population was murdered and perished) received comparatively little publicity and why it took the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum USHMM so long to show an exhibition focusing on Cambodia. Yet another puzzling question is: Why is there so little emphasis on the violence committed during the resettlement, including in the United States? How can the large Cambodian diaspora in the U.S. and around the world be empowered to tell their stories? What are the advantages and disadvantages of technology for the Cambodian diaspora?

In the second panel, titled “Archives of Migration Initiatives,” the participants were presented with three different types of archives, as moderator Paul Burnett emphasized: an established, university-based institution (IHRC), a grassroots initiative that is the process of becoming institutionalized (DOMiD), and an independent community based transregional initiative along the U.S. Mexican border (humanizing deportation). Daniel Necas discussed his and his colleagues’ work at the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) Archives at University of Minnesota Libraries (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/ihrca>), which include large collections of materials documenting immigration to the United States from around the world. The IHRC documents both earlier migration to Minnesota (traditionally from Scandinavia and Central and Eastern Europe), but also more recent migration to Minnesota and the Twin Cities, home to the largest Somali diaspora in the U.S., as well one of the largest Hmong communities in the world. The IHRC records include many different types of records, including autobiographical records, records from resettlement agencies, and oral histories. Daniel also works on the Digitizing Immigrant Letters project, which translates and transcribes letters from migrants from many countries from IHRC’s own collections, and from partner institutions from Eastern and Central Europe, and makes these letters available online. Daniel’s own research interests are the implications of working with archived refugee records. Thanks to a staff research grant from his home institution, he was able to

research at the UNHCR archives in Geneva last year, focusing on the documentation of more recent humanitarian crises by the UNHCR. The agency has to deal with widely scattered, non-standardized, very diverse types of records, and protecting people's privacy is among the biggest challenges. How can refugees and migrants be protected from the "weaponization of information" (Anne Gilliland) and what is the role of the archivist?

Sandra Vacca agreed that she, too, feels torn between a scholarly interest in documenting and making public the voices of vulnerable migrants on the one hand, and the need to protect these individuals on the other in her capacity as a member of the Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany (DOMiD). Operating under this name since 2007, the initiative was established in 1990 by a group of immigrants from Turkey, who set out to address the noticeable gap in documenting the history of migration in Germany by established institutions. With a small and dedicated staff, the organization grew, expanded its collection scope to documenting all immigrant communities in Germany, moved to Cologne, and advocated for the establishment of a central museum of migration in Germany. Recently, in 2019, the German parliament approved 22 Million Euro to build a Museum of Migration in Cologne. The museum will include some virtual reality components, and Sandra showed us a preview of a Virtual Reality modelling of labor conditions in a factory.

Robert Irwin discussed the *Humanizando la Deportacion* project (<http://humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu/es/>), a community-based digital storytelling project that documents the human consequences of mass deportation. Launched in 2017 in Tijuana, which has been the epicenter of deportation visibility in North America, through a collaboration between researchers at UC Davis and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, *Humanizando la Deportacion* expanded in 2018 to the metropolitan areas of Mexico City, Guadalajara, Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey through new collaborations with several Mexican universities. Fieldwork teams in several locations, including Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez and Tapachula, have offered the bilingual platform to migrants in transit to share personal experiences of deportation. The storytellers' agency is at the center of the project, and Robert says that he and they are just beginning to think about issues of digital curation of their archive. The discussion revolved around issues of privacy and the challenge of confronting sensationalist reporting about the migrant caravan with people's stories.

The next morning started with panel three, titled “State Policies and Migrant Knowledge.” While standard accounts deal with the bureaucratic making of migrants and knowledge about migrations, this panel, in turn, discussed whether and how migrant knowledge “from below” has found or might find its way into national or international political decision-making. What were or are the conditions for any productive way of cooperation and exchange? Can archives be used to add historical context to presentist policy debates? From a history of film perspective, Deniz Göktürk discussed the framing of the debates, for instance, the persistence of a national framework. She asked how to respond to a field that is “saturated with images”: Migrants are portrayed as threats on the one hand and as suffering victims on the other. How does this tension affect viewers? She reminded us of several examples, for instance Ai Weiwei’s *Human Flow* (2017) or the famous 1964 picture of Armando Rodrigues de Sá, the millionth guest worker coming to West Germany, who was presented with a motor cycle.

S. Deborah Kang presented her new life as a “fast researcher,” that is, as a co-author of policy briefs and working papers at the U.S. Immigration Policy Center at UC San Diego. Fast research is understood as opposed to the “slow” research of scholars’ work. She underscored the need for scholars to provide historical expertise to policymakers, which means not only to adjust intellectual priorities based on political realities, possibly slowing down tenure-related work, but also to build durable pipelines to policy makers and ensure a diversity of experts. Kang has been preparing working papers and briefs (with Tom Wong and other colleagues) on the recent immigration enforcement policies issued by the Trump administration for the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (<https://usipc.ucsd.edu/publications/index.html>). On the plus side, she has had the experience that “the public at large wants to hear from us.” In the discussion, it was highlighted that historians do not necessarily bring enlightenment. Historical knowledge is not always an antidote to racism because historians, too, harbor political ideas and ideologies. But again, the question was raised whether there are ways to overcome scholarly silos, the separation of academy and activists, practitioners and scholars? What kinds of spaces can we create together, collectively? How can we leverage the network brought together in this workshop, for instance?

The last panel, “Self-Organization and Migrant Knowledge,” inquired into migrant activists’ intellectual, educational and cultural

approaches to migration. Which audiences do they address? Which media do they choose? Which notions of participation, empowerment, or politicization do they embrace or reject? Leslie Quintanilla discussed transnational border activism, art and activism. She, too, pointed out how difficult yet imperative it is to take precautions against involuntarily damaging individual refugees by recounting their stories. This is true not only on the individual level, but also for refugee groups assembling at the Mexican side of the border. By way of example, Leslie addressed ongoing micro-organizational dissent and emerging hierarchical structures within collectives of refugees and the ethical and practical challenges this produces for the organizations supporting the refugees.

Mervete Bobaj gave a preview of the evening's film presentation at the Goethe-Institut San Francisco and discussed the background and work of MPower e.V., an NGO empowering young migrant women through documentary filmmaking in collaboration with the Berlin Hochschule der Künste and other film experts. Author and theater director Dan Thy Nguyen presented us with his idea to interview migrants in a stage-like environment, emphasizing a culture of portraits and self-portraits. The European Migration Knowledge Archive (EUMKA) is an ongoing project (<https://eumka.org>). Originally developed to collect biographies of a pluralistic European society, it became a tool for online education and archiving perspectives and life experiences, which are not fully represented and perceived in a general mainstream. Both Bobaj and Nguyen shared some of their work at the concluding evening program at the Goethe-Institute San Francisco, short films by girls taking part in the MPower program in Bobaj's case and dramatic readings from two of his plays for Nguyen. The event was open to the public and led to a lively discussion.

In the concluding discussion, Daniel Necas summarized issues that came up at the colloquium, highlighting different types of archives with very different types of records (international organizations, national government, social service agencies, community groups, personal records, etc.) He saw much value in cooperating more closely with artists and practitioners. He believes that great benefit comes from artists and practitioners in residence programs. Katja Hering highlighted the importance for scholars to cooperate with archives and archivists (like the cooperation of the Allies with the archives at San Diego State University). Migration scholars and historians can especially benefit from archival initiatives and collabo-

rations in the post-custodial tradition (meaning that custody remains in the creator communities and is not transferred to a repository), and archival scholarship about documenting migration and refugee experiences, and experience with ethics based digital curation. The symposium made clear that blurring the lines and building connections between scholars, archivists, activists, artists, and practitioners can be mind-opening, and should happen much more often.

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