

## **FOURTH ANNUAL BUCERIUS YOUNG SCHOLAR FORUM. HISTORIES OF MIGRATION: TRANSATLANTIC AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES**

Virtual Workshop held on October 12-14, 2020; organized by the Pacific Regional Office of the GHI Washington at the University of California, Berkeley. Sponsored by ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerus. Conveners: Isabella Löhr (University of Osnabrück), Christiane Reinecke (University of Osnabrück), Andrea Westermann (Pacific Regional Office of the GHI Washington, PRO). Participants: Alexander Collin (University of Amsterdam); Stacey Fahrenthold (UC Davis); Peter Gatrell (University of Manchester); Sasha Gora (Amerika-Institut, LMU München); Jonathan Holst (University of Lübeck); Emma Meyer (Emory University); L. Ohad Reiss Sorokin (Duke University); Andrea Ringer (Tennessee State University); Marjan Wardaki (UC Los Angeles); Judith Weltz (University of Innsbruck).

With eight pre-circulated papers, precise, compact, and generous peer comments on these papers given on the spot, and two fantastic chairs, the workshop group created and inhabited a space of creative scholarly exchange. Two entangled questions emerged as overarching concerns: How do we tell stories about migration that do not mirror or reproduce the categorizations of the state or former restrictive migration regimes? And does a focus on knowledge help to unsettle established and influential narratives about migration? If epistemic sensibility is what characterizes historical research in general, and, maybe, historians' engagement with ideas, world-making practices, working skills, academic landscapes, archives, law making, and other forms of knowledge as objects of research, in particular, the second question stood at the center of our discussion. Moreover, two other notions came to the fore that pointed beyond the register of the epistemological and conveyed the urgency and *engagé* spirit that may turn scholarly debates into meaningful public interventions: participants recurrently highlighted both the lived and empirical messiness of migration processes or refugee-making. Fittingly, perhaps, Judith Weltz's argument that there is "enjoyment of/in law," i. e. collective enjoyment in seeing order or neat distinctions established, underscored that emotional aspects loom large on migration policies and need to be studied when it comes to the history of (forced) displacement, diaspora, refugees, or in general to the contested history of movements in space.

The first day saw environmental histories of the circus and the restaurant, or more specifically: histories of human animal relationships. As Sasha Gora put it plainly: in the circus, animals are arranged on stage, in the restaurants, dead animals are arranged on a plate. In the panel titled “Migrating Knowledge: Spaces, Bodies, and Economies,” the papers presented commodity histories and its colonial legacies, they elaborated on the role of skilled and unskilled labor in these migration processes and they reflected upon the gendered dimension of work both in circuses and in restaurants. Andrea Ringer analyzed the circuses as particularly global workplaces. This transience created networks of knowledge connecting the different show operators. Horse trainers, canvassmen, candy butchers, and elephant keepers brought with them a whole host of knowledge as they traveled between shows and around the world. Records from circus archives, personal accounts, government records, and trade journals provide a unique look at migrant entertainers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They demonstrate how animal trainers transferred knowledge between shows and among themselves. They brought their experiences from animal dealer Carl Hagenbeck’s headquarters in Germany, traveling shows in the U.S., and animal holding pens in colonized spaces in East Africa to perform some of the most dangerous and controversial acts ever put on stage.

From pursuing prey and plants to fleeing drought and crop failures, migrants have often been motivated by the quest for food, and they continue to do so in our current era of climate change. Simply put, hunger feeds movement. L. Sasha Gora started to explore the entangled relationship between migration, power, and food in her paper “A Sweeter Milk: Food, Knowledge, and Migration” on culinary knowledge in the United States with a focus on restaurants and labor. Gora viewed culinary practices as a means of knowledge production and dissemination. The paper highlighted food’s central role in experiences of migration, from the preservation of culinary knowledge to economic entrepreneurship. By exploring various ways of acquiring and employing culinary knowledge, Gora presented food as a complex intersection between the transfer of food knowledge, its performative “re-enactment,” entrepreneurship, colonial path-dependencies and racial segregation.

The second day shifted attention from those who create knowledge in practice to those who produce academic knowledge on our

contemporary world. The first paper of the panel titled “Migrant Knowledge and Intellectual Infrastructures: Circles and Think Tanks” analyzed highly selective academic circles as specific sites of knowledge production, while the second paper introduced the other participants to the intellectual history of a 1987 essay and argument on open borders and its reception in several academic circles or disciplines. Ohad Reiss Sorokin argued that, alongside their ideas and social networks, émigré intellectuals brought with them a certain understanding of how intellectual work was done, for instance, via the semi-private scholarly forum known as a *Kreis* (circle). In his paper, Sorokin focused on one intellectual circle, the *Geistkreis* in Vienna. The *Geistkreis* was a long-standing interdisciplinary event accommodating economists (Hayek, Morgenstern), sociologists (Schutz), political scientists, art historians, businessmen, and lawyers. Most of the members fled to the United States after 1938. Some of them became successful scholars and still felt they had never truly arrived because they recurrently failed in reviving circle-like institutions at their new domains such as the University at Buffalo or the University of Chicago. Based on archival research, Sorokin followed these attempts and inquired into the difficulties to migrate academic institutions. He pointed to the challenges of reconciling different academic cultures for the scholars involved.

Rather than focusing on the circulations of a particular academic form of knowledge production, the second paper traced the history of a particular academic debate about migration. It takes its starting point in the political now. A current controversy in the social sciences deals with the idea of global freedom of movement – an idea that promotes everyone’s right to decide for themselves where in the world they want to reside. Jonathan Holst looked into the first phase of this debate in North America and discussed how it was started by Joseph Carens’ 1987 essay “Aliens and Citizens: the case for open borders.” He explored the intellectual contexts in which the plea for open borders was made and asked if the idea of global freedom of movement should be understood as an expression of neoliberalism. Counterintuitively, perhaps, advocates of this idea tended to perceive themselves as critics of neoliberalism. Holst examined the historical conditions that led to the scholarly debate about open borders. Exploring the interconnection between scholarly debates and the negotiations within wider society, Holst argued that the institutionalization of the open borders debate was due to societal, cultural, and political changes in the 1970s. He referred especially

to the interplay between the so-called rebirth of political theory and an expanding public interest in the topic of migration.

Our third panel, “Migratory Subjects in the Making: Of States, Refugees and Deportees,” turned to governments and administrations and asked how they produce a specific, regulatory knowledge on migration and how this knowledge affected the lives of migrant and refugees throughout the twentieth century. Emma C. Meyer engaged with the *longue durée* history of Indian migrants to Burma (Myanmar). In the period between 1840 and 1940, an estimated 12 to 15 million people, the vast majority of whom were laborers, were both the subjects and objects of this history. On the eve of the Second World War, Indian diasporic communities in colonial Burma composed one of the largest populations of “Indians overseas” anywhere in the world. The outbreak of fighting between the imperial Japanese military and Allied forces in December 1941 led hundreds of thousands of people to leave Burma, seeking shelter in neighboring lands. Approximately half a million of these evacuees, mostly people of Indian descent, made their way to British India. The south Indian district of Visakhapatnam took in more than 68,000 evacuees and eventually became the site of numerous government-run work projects designed to offer “relief” and “rehabilitation” to the displaced, most of whom arrived destitute. Meyer examined programs and policies used to resettle Burma evacuees in Visakhapatnam during the 1940s and early 1950s and explored the origins of refuge-making for displaced people in twentieth-century India. She investigated the colonial underpinnings of refuge in South Asia by focusing on the connections between earlier methods of managing migrants who crossed the Bay of Bengal and later systems of dealing with mass displacement. Meyer argued that colonial-era forms of producing knowledge on migration and categorizing migrants—particularly “unskilled” labor migrants—in the Bay of Bengal region were central to later systems for managing displaced populations.

Judith Welz investigated the relationship between knowledge production and the management of refugee populations in late twentieth-century Austria. The early 1990s marked a restrictive turn in migration policies in most of Europe. Mirroring this trend, laws and political debates concerning the deportation of non-citizens multiplied in Austria. Welz explored the construction of “deportable subjects” (Nicholas De Genova) in two episodes of policy-making. Her first case study is set in the year 1990 when the figure of the “illegal

migrant” appeared in Austrian political discourse, and deportation policies and practices were transformed to target migrants lacking documentation. The second case explores how asylum claimants were rendered more easily deportable in 2005 when a number of procedural rights and liberties were cut back. Welz argued that deportation policy-making is a moment when society is negotiated and produced. By encoding who remains an outsider and can therefore forcibly and physically be excluded, policy-makers are defining not only the boundaries of the body politic, but society itself. She framed the production of knowledge in deportation policy-making as a form of political crisis management that aims to sort out and simplify complex social realities. Accordingly, Welz argued that deportation policies have contributed to the reproduction of neoliberal capitalist societies, where a growing inequality weakens social cohesion. She showed how political actors continuously managed to frame immigration as a domestic issue, thus disconnecting it from counter-hegemonic claims that were based in a more transnational reading of Austria’s present moment.

Just like Reiss Sorkin’s research on exiled Central European scholars in the U.S., the fourth panel, titled “Shaping Institutions: Migrants and Networks,” dealt with academic migration, this time across historical epochs. Alexander Collin considered evidence of the education and political culture of decision makers in the government of the city of Bremen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Collin concentrated on the influence of migration on that culture. An important feature of life in city-states or other small states was their reliance on the world beyond their borders for various resources, not only material but also resources of knowledge and information. Drawing on the collections of the Bremen State Archive, Collin traced geographical, quantitative, and milieu-related patterns of early life migration and their changes during the early modern period. In his paper, he examined the impact these patterns had on the governance practices of the Bremen Senate. Beyond their immediate impact on the municipal politics of one city, changing numbers and destinations of university travels might help explain the economic and political development of the North Sea and Baltic region after the decline of the Hanseatic League, as well as contribute to a more nuanced picture of cultural and political life in the early modern city at large.

Exploring the link between knowledge and migration practices in the twentieth century, Marjan Wardaki’s paper focused on a heterogeneous

group of South Asian students, their experiences, and intellectual formation during their sojourn at German and Scottish universities. In particular, Wardaki highlighted how migrants drew on different concepts such as *akademische Freiheit* or academic mobility to produce new ideas about medicine, technology, and science and to negotiate their new training around an ever-changing political landscape across Eurasia. The set of questions that her paper asks involved the use of “migration” as an analytic framework. Shedding light on different patterns of mobility helped her show that migration can include both temporary and sedentary settlements and does not always stem from conditions of exile and displacement. By focusing on how Afghan and Indian students drew on intellectual “contact zones” to produce, synthesize, and transform knowledge into new meaning, the paper sought to highlight the role of non-Europeans in rendering knowledge applicable to new local settings and shaping the history of “modern” sciences in the course of the twentieth century.

Taken together, the rich discussions about the role of knowledge in the labeling and practicing of migration brought up a set of questions addressing the aims and objects of historical migration research in general. First, the participants avoided the trap of reproducing official or state categories to order migration by not singularizing the migration process as such. Rather, they preferred to embed their objects of research in a dense description that took the everyday experiences of the historical actors into consideration – be they refugees, skilled or unskilled migrant workers, racialized subjects, intellectuals, or state officials. In this way, they highlighted the many intersections of knowledge making in, through and by migration with colonial knowledge production, professional career making, bureaucratic procedures, or resistant subaltern practices. While, at first glance, such an approach might seem to decenter the history of migration, it brings other categories to the fore such as race and race relations, social (upward and downward) mobility, labor, or (subaltern) practices of claim making and resistance. Analytically, this proves to be rewarding, as migration transforms into a cross-sectional field that connects a number of different fields, such as social, cultural or political history. In a similar vein, the papers used the term knowledge in a broad sense that includes professional knowledge, institutional knowledge, scientific knowledge and a kind of intuitive or everyday knowledge. The papers ask how these different forms of knowledge become visible in certain

situations related to the migration process and how they support or hinder the mastery of migration-related situations. At the same time, however, the papers showed the difficulties to pin down the very process of knowledge making, especially with regard to historical actors that are normally not perceived as knowledge producers such as laborers, refugees or students. Taken together, they made us aware of the variety of “knowledges,” of the different forms of knowledge production and of its multiple uses to govern people, to develop or unfold skills or to remember and translate cultural practices and shape cultural identities. They also helped us to critically reflect on our own knowledge production and our use of categories. Against this background, the Young Scholars Forum served as an excellent reminder to historians to stay aware of the analytical complexity and empirical messiness of migration processes and to remain epistemically sensible for the various forms knowledge may take in historically specific contexts.

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