

Fifth Annual Bucerius Young Scholars Forum Histories of Migration: Transatlantic and Global Perspectives

Workshop held virtually on October 18-20, 2021, organized by the Pacific Office of the GHI Washington at the University of California, Berkeley. Sponsored by ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius. Conveners: Franziska Exeler (Free University Berlin/University of Cambridge) and Sören Urbansky (Pacific Office of the GHI Washington). Participants: Roi Ball (Tel Aviv University), Annika Bärwald (University of Bremen), Ulrike Bialas (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity Göttingen), Eriks Bredovskis (University of Toronto), Ulf Brunnbauer (Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg), Kateryna Burkush (European University Institute, Florence), Stacy Fahrenthold (University of California Davis), Peter Gatrell (University of Manchester), Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş (GHI Washington), Larissa Kopytoff (University of South Florida), Fabrice Langrognet (University of Paris 1/Global Public Policy Institute Berlin), Phi Nguyen (HEAD-Genève), H. Glenn Penny (University of Iowa), Fabio Santos (University of Aarhus/Free University Berlin), Andrey Shlyakhter (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research), Abraham Trejo-Terreiros (independent scholar).

“Knowing refugees” has a double meaning, as Peter Gatrell explained in this year’s Bucerius Lecture titled “Knowing Refugees, Historically Speaking”: while it denotes the knowledge produced by institutional actors to control refugee migration, it also alludes to the refugees’ own knowledge that enables them to frame their displacement experience

and navigate the institutional frameworks. Starting from this fruitful juxtaposition, the lecture highlighted different dimensions of knowledge shaping refugee regimes and their relevance to historical research. Peter Gatrell reminded historians of the existence of refugees who remain unknown because they died, became lost in transit or stayed underground. Besides obliterating those fates, many historical sources and archives also tend to turn most refugees into unknown numbers or contextless cases in files. Moreover, by defining who counts as a refugee and who does not, states and international organizations produce unrecognized and thus unknown refugees. Against this backdrop, Gatrell invited migration researchers to critically question their own (sources of) knowledge and reflect on the blind spots of archives and historical material. Besides making a case for highlighting refugees' voices and individual contexts, Gatrell also suggested that historians should go beyond studying institutional and migrants' knowledge about regimes of legal recognition and instead write histories that help acknowledge refugees not only as refugees but as humans, worthy not through legality or eligibility but "by virtue of their humanity." In the following conversation moderated by Stacy Fahrenthold, Gatrell also emphasized that methodological approaches and normative choices are intimately linked.

Reflections on source gaps and the researcher's role in building analytical bridges between institutional developments and migrants' experiences continued during the following three-day Bucerius Young Scholars' Forum. This year, the forum's central theme was borderlands. Eleven early career researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds and academic institutions on both sides of the Atlantic met online to discuss questions of migration, everyday lives, and knowledge production in and about borderlands in various world regions. An especially rewarding feature of the forum were the intense discussions. Instead of presentations, each panel started with peer comments on the pre-circulated

papers, followed by further debates between all contributors, chairs, and the senior scholars who contributed to the forum with their expertise.

The first panel focused on historical connections between Germany and the wider imperial world, highlighting how those connections contributed to mental boundaries and otherness. Annika Bärwald, in her paper “The Port City as Borderland: Hamburg, Its Non-European Migrants, and the Production of Difference, 1750-1840,” argued that the presence of Black and Asian laborers and seamen turned Hamburg into a contact zone between the German hinterland and the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. Utilizing institutional sources on local conflicts and crime, she argued that Hamburg was both a contact and a border zone. The combination of phenotypical differences and poverty made non-Europeans prone to discrimination and deportations. In the second paper, “Germany’s Color Line: The United States, the German Foreign Office, and the ‘Yellow Peril,’” Eriks Bredovskis used diplomatic sources to analyze how local German consulate staff perceived the discrimination of Asian immigrants in North America. Understanding their perceptions as part of a broader German discourse on the “global color line,” his paper engaged with German imperialism beyond its own *Reich*. In the following discussion, the participants picked up the issue of source gaps and unknown actors raised in the Bucerius lecture. In the latter case, some of the diplomats decided not to share their knowledge about local anti-Asian incidents with the foreign office in Germany, thus creating a silence in the archives; in the former case, the migrants’ own perspectives are suppressed while only the institutional knowledge is preserved in the state archives. As Glenn Penny remarked, both papers illustrate that historians sometimes must identify and deal with “gatekeepers of knowledge.”

The second day started with a panel on cross-border migration in German imperial and Soviet history. Roi Ball’s paper

"Transnational Farming Families and Agrarian Settlement in Imperial Peripheries: A Preliminary Exploration between Württemberg and Prussian Poland, and Ottoman Palestine, 1860-1914," followed the transnational settlement of Swabian pietist families at German imperial frontiers. Roi Ball used local village and church archives in Southern Germany as a starting point for a bottom-up history of imperial globalization. He investigated local, family-based colonization and community-building and its relationship with empire-making and nation-building. Kateryna Burkush's paper on "Seasonal Migration: Problem or Solution? Soviet Initiatives of Stimulating and Managing Seasonal Labor Migration in the 1950s-1980s" revealed the permeability of borders in the late Soviet Union, as thousands of seasonal laborers from Transcarpathia frequently moved to more eastern parts of Ukraine and the wider USSR to improve their income and acquire material resources. Showing that the state was unable to gain control over these autonomous mobilities, Kateryna Burkush's paper challenged the image of the Soviet state as one that was able to keep a tight regime over borders and economic migration. Both papers proved that focusing on the local roots of migration can open new, bottom-up perspectives on larger state-driven projects like imperialism or planned economies. And, as Eriks Bredovskis also implied in his comment, the papers cast doubt on the usefulness of traditional classifications in migration studies, namely the distinction between internal and external migration, which easily blurs in imperial contexts.

States' attempts to maintain borders as lines of exclusion was one of the main themes that connected the papers presented during the following two panels. Abraham Trejo-Terreros' paper, "Migrants in Transit and Human Smuggling in the 1920s U.S.-Mexico Borderlands," showed how state measures to control migration such as taxes, medical inspections, and tests not only led to a growing professionalization of traffickers but also increased corruption on the part of the border guards. He thus made a historical argu-

ment to complicate the binary image of human smugglers as those who subvert and state agents as those who enforce the border regime. Based on an empirically rich survey, Andrey Shlyakhter, with his contribution "Back to the USSR: Explaining the Growth of the Soviet Border Guard, 1917-1939," challenged the idea that the main task of Soviet border forces was to imprison the population. Especially in the interwar period, as Shlyakhter showed, the Soviet state authorities' main concern were not escaping citizens but cross-border threats like irregular fighters, spies, and smugglers, leading him to argue that the state's response to those threats, as a side effect, reinforced its repressive capacity.

Inner borderlands were another common theme that linked the papers presented on the second and third day, which focused on cities and microhistories of identity and boundary-making in everyday life. Larissa Kopytoff's paper, "Borderlands at the Center: Mobility, Space, and Citizenship in French Colonial Senegal," shed light on the inner boundaries separating the commune Saint-Louis, whose inhabitants received French citizen rights in 1916, from the hinterland, thus transcending the distinction between nation and colony. Kopytoff showed that Africans from the commune's banlieues and the wider colony used the lack of knowledge and control on the part of the colonial authorities to traverse the boundary and obtain access to legal and infrastructural opportunities available in the enclave. In his paper "Boundary-Making Far from the Border: Migrant Citizenship in a Paris Suburb in the Early Twentieth Century," Fabrice Langrognet investigated the production of nationality-based difference in a postmigration setting. Boundaries were reinforced and altered every day via bureaucratic practices, citizen obligations, and social rights such as military conscription, welfare, and voting. Fabrice Langrognet highlighted the agency of individual immigrants who, through negligence, conscious strategies, or social interactions, undermined the nationality divide and contributed to shaping hybrid forms of integration. In her paper "Devout Land-

scape – Migrant Placemaking through the Afterlife in Hué, Vietnam,” Phi Nguyen showed how in the city of Hué, which was shaped by a history of cross-border conflicts, colonialism, and displacement, religious buildings represent past mobilities and make them coexist in the present. Phi Nguyen argued that material structures symbolically connect multiple places and temporalities, producing a form of social belonging that transcends time, borders, and uprootedness. All in all, the papers and subsequent discussion made visible the extent to which borderlands act as physical divides and examples of material space-making. On the other hand, symbolical, legal, and social practices are not necessarily tied to specific places.

The last panel of the forum addressed the (il)legalization and deportability of migrants in Germany and French Guiana. Ulrike Bialas’ study “Forever 17: Young Asylum Seekers and the Struggle for Minority” traced the precarious situation of adult male asylum seekers in present Germany who pass as underaged youths to avoid deportation (*Abschiebung*) and extend their legal status. As Bialas showed, this classification pressure can cost the migrants their autonomy and increase paternalism from administrative and care institutions. The formal change of age can even affect people’s identities, as Bialas argued, especially as it generates a paradoxical dichotomy between the journey to Europe, which is often seen as a rite of passage to male adulthood, and the infantilized life as a minor in Germany. In the second paper, “‘Europe’ in ‘Latin America’: Illegalized Mobilities, Deportable Bodies, and Contested Sovereignties in the French-Brazilian Borderland,” Fabio Santos addressed unequal and forced mobilities in the overseas territory French Guiana. These are symbolically manifested by a large bridge across the border river that connects Latin America with the European Union, while also marking a stark contrast to the discreet and dangerous river crossings by migrants. Elaborating on the long history of asymmet-

ric mobilities in the former French penal colony, Fabio Santos emphasized the significance of (post)colonial exclaves and special zones as laboratories for state measures aiming at illegalization and deportation. Both papers, as Andrey Shlyakhter highlighted in his comment, draw our attention to seemingly natural borders to which states attach meaning and legal potency, implicitly underscoring how the creation of environmental/topological knowledge and biological knowledge supports migration regimes.

This year's Bucerius Young Scholars Forum vividly demonstrated how fruitful it can be to use state boundaries, borderlands, and enclaves as methodological observation posts for investigating migration processes. The result were locally grounded, rich micro-historical papers that made everyday conflicts over immigration, state security, national identity, and belonging visible. Ambiguous and permeable as they are, borderlands also make us aware of the analytical boundaries of a state-centered framework: while borders are sites sustained by state knowledge about migration, security, and control, they also turn the spotlight on migrants and their knowledge resources that help them to undermine spatial and social borders. In the concluding discussion, Peter Gatrell directed the conversation towards another boundary—that between the knowledge we create as scholars and the broader public including (former) migrants and refugees. Who do we write for? How do we communicate our findings? Can our research gain surplus value beyond our academic networks and careers? Transatlantic venues like the Young Scholars Forum thus also encourage us to think about joint efforts to reach broader, non-academic audiences – thereby more firmly connecting historical analyses of borders, borderlands and migration to present-day public discussions on global migration currents.

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