

## Seventh Annual Bucerius Young Scholars Forum: Indigenous Migration

Workshop held September 22–23, 2023, at the GHI Washington Pacific Office at the University of California, Berkeley, followed by a joint field trip to Sitka, Alaska. Sponsored by the ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius. Conveners: Holly Guise (University of New Mexico), Sören Urbansky (Ruhr-Universität Bochum), and Nino Vallen (GHI Pacific Office). Participants: Stefan Benz (University of Bonn), Colton Brandau (University of California, Davis), Ian Halter (University of Oregon), Amy Kerner (University of California, Berkeley, and GHI Pacific Office), Lea Kröner (Freie Universität Berlin), Chechesh Kudachinova (University of Mannheim), Chenxi Luo (Washington University in St. Louis), Hillary MacKinlay (Georgetown University), Maria Momzikova (University of Tartu), Akasemi Newsome (University of California, Berkeley), Rachel Nolan (Boston University), Tamar Polyakova (University of Wisconsin-Madison and Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland), Jorge Ramirez-Lopez (University of California, Los Angeles), Sandra Sánchez (Yale University), Fabio Santos (University of California, Berkeley, and GHI Pacific Office).

The 2023 Bucerius Young Scholars Forum focused on Indigenous migrations. Taking a trans-epochal and transregional perspective, participants contributed a wide range of empirically rich studies to situate Indigenous sources and histories in relation to traditional imperial histories and the history of knowledge production. Nino Vallen offered introductory remarks to give direction and coherence to the process of collective inquiry. Namely, how can Indigenous agency change historical narratives? What are the shapes (linear? circular?) and effects (on families, communities) of Indigenous mobilities? Is it possible to narrate stories of

Indigenous experience from an Indigenous perspective, and how? And in doing so, how should scholars engage with colonial and Indigenous epistemologies?

The first panel, “Forced Migrations,” sketched a new roadmap for Indigenous global history through two vastly different cases: seventeenth-century Russian encounters with a range of Indigenous groups in the colony they called Siberia (Chechesh Kudachinova, “Moving Bodies, Mobile Lives: Framing Forced Indigenous Mobilities and the Production of Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century Siberia”) and the forced migrations of Indigenous Guatemalans in and from Central America and the United States (Rachel Nolan, “From Genocide to Drought: Indigenous (Maya) Migration from and Deportation to Guatemala, 1980s to the Present”). While the papers drew on very different modes of analysis—oblique reading of colonial Russian archives in one case, and ethnographic interviews for the other—both juxtaposed anti-Indigenous violence, by colonialism or by anti-immigration policy, to the knowledge and skill of Indigenous actors. Thus, Russian settlement by forts can be reframed as a countermove to the tremendous mobility of Indigenous people in the contested region, and Indigenous Guatemalan activist responses to climate crises may be conditioned by deeper histories of genocide survival.

In the second panel, “Negotiating Colonialism,” Colton Brandau and Lea Kröner brought different temporal scales to the centering of Indigenous agency under Russian and Canadian rule, respectively. Brandau examined Indigenous Qikertarmiut memories in Russian pre-Siberia over nearly a century, with particular attention to Qikertarmiut lexicon of the natural world (“‘Curiosity Drove Us to Examine It More Closely’: Qikertarmiut Memories of Movement under Russian Colonialism, 1784–1851”). Lea Kröner’s paper, on Indigenous converts and missionaries in what is now British Columbia, reconsidered the voices of Indigenous converts whose choices can appear, in retrospect, to perpetuate religious

institutions of colonial oppression (“Mobility and Agency: Indigenous Missionaries on the North Pacific Coast during the Nineteenth Century”). The discussion circled around the power and limits of the sources—what, exactly, do Indigenous language terms or acts of conversion disclose?—and the emerging theme of shifting colonial attitudes toward Indigenous mobility.

“Fighting for Sovereignty” was the theme that connected the two papers of the third panel, encompassing studies on Fiji and the United States-Canadian borderland. Hillary MacKinlay’s paper, “Indigenous Actors, Imperial Politics, and the Birth of the Kingdom of Fiji, 1867–1871,” examined violent political change in Fiji. By acknowledging the different positionalities of coastal and interior Indigenous communities, MacKinlay described the role they played in the rise to power and its eventual concession by Cakobau, a short-lived monarch whose reign preceded the establishment of British Empire sovereignty over the islands in 1874. Sanchez’s paper, “Deportation and Blood Quantum: Tribal Border Crossing Rights, 1928–1940,” was concerned with the legal institutionalization of immobility in between Canada and the United States, strongly tied to longstanding racial stereotypes. Unpacking these processes of bordering and othering, Sánchez emphasized the historical cross-border mobility of Native people, criticized the citizen/non-citizen binary prevailing in migration studies and politics, and asserted that national borders disrupted long-standing Native political relationships and landscapes. Besides proving the necessary diligence in giving nuance and voice to otherwise forgotten Indigenous actors in migration histories, both papers and the subsequent discussion also illustrated the centrality of space and place.

In the fourth panel, “Connecting to the Homeland,” homelands figured centrally, but differently, in the ways migrants made meaning far from their places of birth. Chenxi Luo’s

paper, "When Distance Turned into Disputes: Manchu Migration, Translocal Homeland, and Slavery-Related Disputes in Early Qing China, 1600–1722," focused on the early Qing Dynasty. The paper showed how migrations to inner China worked in the service of a newly established imperial system to create possibilities for enslaved people to build their lives with newfound autonomy, far from their masters. As one discussant put it, in the Qing Dynasty, distance opened the door to "mischief at home." By contrast, in Jorge Ramirez-Lopez's paper, "How Indigenous Migrants from Southern Mexico Made Oaxacalifornia," Indigenous migrants from Oaxaca made their Mexican villages into notional anchors of activist solidarity. Discussants took particular interest in the way Lopez' interviews with migrants connected Indigenous practices of community responsibility born in Mexico to a US-based Indigenous rights movement. In both cases, distance from the homeland reconfigured its meaning and opened new horizons of action and activism.

Under the theme of "Indigenous Knowledge Producers," the fifth panel connected studies zooming in on two allegedly peripheral sites of migration and knowledge production: Alaska and Karelia. Ian Halter, in his paper "Shores of Knowledge, Waves of Ignorance: Settler Agnotologies and Alaska Natives' (Epistemic) Mobilities, 1860 to 1897," explored the tension between knowledge and ignorance in the context of the United States' colonial acquisition of Alaska in 1867. In an "epistemic environment in which the most influential voices on Alaska were often the worst informed," Halter argued, ignorance was instrumental to suppressing the intimate knowledge held over generations by Native communities. Tamara Polyakova's paper, "'Russian' Cold: Fighting for Karelia, 1918–22," looked at the battlegrounds of the Russian Civil War, specifically in Karelia, through the lens of cold: both a reality and an exaggerated social construction, climate conditions were employed as a strategy to point out the northern region's need to be "domesticated."

Both papers, the comments, and discussion added an epistemological dimension to the symposium, calling for radical deconstructions of even the most taken-for-granted knowledges and instead recentring Indigenous knowledge producers and productions.

The last panel of the forum addressed the theme of “Storytelling Migration.” Maria Momzikova’s paper, “How Do Indigenous Myths Represent Colonial Relations? Russian vs. Nganasan Supernatural Beings in Nganasan Mythological Narratives,” examined how the Russian colonization of social worlds encompasses myths, resulting in colonial hierarchies of mythological beings. The research of Stefan Benz, entitled “(Re-)Negotiating Indigenous Presence and Arrival: Indigenous Hip Hop Claims the US American City,” reinscribed Indigenous perspectives into US history by analyzing the output of Litefoot (Cherokee) and Sacramento Knox (Anishinaabe), two rappers illustrating Indigenous rhythmic sovereignty—resistance to the settler state enacted through cultural expressions—in the mid-1990s as well as in recent years. Both papers raised important questions about how to incorporate both historical and contemporary representations and cultural expressions of Indigenous groups and individuals into a pluralized historiography of the topic at hand.

This year’s Bucerius Young Scholars Forum was followed by a joint field trip to Sitka, Alaska, in order to connect the academic discussion with historical and current struggles over mobility experienced by different Indigenous groups and individuals at the crossroads of the Russian and American empires. Two highlights of the trip included the public screening of the documentary “Indigenous Resistance: Now and Then,” followed by an exchange with Sitka’s community at the Sheet’ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi Tribal Community House, and a tour with curator Jacqueline Fernandez-Hamberg at the Sheldon Jackson Museum, home to artifacts representing

all Alaska Native cultural groups. At the end of the field trip, all participants offered their reflections on how the forum brought together a variety of histories, shining light on different regions and informed by different research methods. Participants agreed they felt compelled to step beyond their usual boundaries in a productive way. Overall, both the symposium in Berkeley and the field trip in Sitka showed the importance of filling the gap in standard migration theory and historiography with Indigenous voices and experiences across temporal and spatial scales.

**Amy Kerner and Fabio Santos**

(GHI Pacific Office and University of California, Berkeley)