

HISTORIES OF MIGRATION: TRANSATLANTIC AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Second Bucerius Young Scholars Forum at the Pacific Regional Office of the GHI Washington in Berkeley, October 17-19, 2018. Sponsored by the Zeit-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius. Convener: Andrea Westermann (GHI Washington). Participants: Jutta Allmendinger (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin), Lily Balloffet (UC Santa Cruz), Sarah Beringer (GHI Washington), Irene Bloemraad (UC Berkeley), Almuth Ebke (University of Mannheim), Onur Erdur (Humboldt University of Berlin), Stacy Fahrenthold (UC Davis), Donna Gabaccia (University of Toronto), Michael Göring (Zeit-Stiftung), Axel Jansen (GHI Washington), Simone Lässig (GHI Washington), Risto Lenz (University of Cologne), Barbara Luethi (University of Cologne), Joseph Malherek (University of Vienna), David Miliband (International Rescue Committee), Benjamin Nobbs-Thiessen (Arizona State University), Marcia C. Schenck (Free University of Berlin), Avi Sharma (Technical University of Berlin), Jordan Buchanan Smith (Widener University), Florian Wagner (GHI Washington).

Ten junior scholars from both sides of the Atlantic presented their research in the field of migration history. They were joined by GHI West research fellows and three senior experts in the field of migration history. The presentations and discussions tackled questions and methodological issues in migration history from a history of knowledge perspective. What could an emerging “history of migrant knowledges” look like? Also, the notion of “migrant knowledges” raised some questions: What exactly counts as knowledge? Who, in the context and processes of migrations, knows what? And who or what is actually on the move?

The two day-meeting opened with a well-attended public keynote lecture by David Miliband, President of the International Rescue Committee, entitled: “What Is in a Category: Telling Political Refugees and Economic Migrants Apart.” The speaker was introduced by Michael Göring, CEO and President of the Zeit-Stiftung. Jutta Allmendinger, Director of the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin and, at the time, Fellow at the Thomas Mann Haus in Los Angeles, served as discussant in a short conversation with Miliband and as moderator of a subsequent Q&A session. Miliband stressed the growing gap between the needs of and the provisions for refugees. Climate change and other modern developments create new categories of refugees

that still need to be accepted as such by the international community. Interviewed by Jutta Allmendinger, he also noted that most refugees are school-age children but very little is done for their education. In this regard and beyond, both Miliband and Allmendinger pointed out, industrialized nations could learn from the countries of the so-called Global South, who in fact deal with the highest influx of refugees.

The workshop was organized in five panels, featuring two papers each, which opened with two comments by fellow participants, followed by discussion of the precirculated papers. Following different groups of migrants on their way through societies and across borders, the selected papers observed and analyzed these actors' efforts to generate knowledge at various sites and in different realms. Faced with bureaucratic and/or academic routines of categorization, racialization, and legalization of their status, of themselves as persons, or of their cultural production, migrants developed different tactics for addressing them. Arguably, in these histories of (forced) transit and re-accommodation, migrants themselves became experts of migration, producing, contesting, accumulating, and deploying political, legal, or economic knowledge. The forum also paid special attention to migrants as creators of historical knowledge and memory, who both suffered from and contributed to instances of intentional highlighting, forgetting, or silencing past encounters, stories, and experiences.

Panel A was dedicated to "Migrant Knowledges of Nature: Perspectives from Body and Labor History." Benjamin Nobbs-Thiessen shared his work about "Settlers, Braceros, Narcos: 'Horse and Buggy' Mennonites in Mexico, Canada, and the U.S., 1921-Present." In the early 1990s, reports that "traditional" Old Colony horse-and-buggy Mennonites were involved in an elaborate transnational smuggling ring that connected their well-established colonies in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua and their new settlements in Ontario elicited shock in the Canadian media. Moving beyond sensationalism, Nobbs-Thiessen explored the multi-generational practices of transnational mobility that these low-German-speaking, pacifist Anabaptists forged and sustained over the twentieth century as they took on changing roles as settlers, migrant laborers (braceros), and smugglers. The panel's second paper, "The Invention of this Noble Liquor: Free and Coerced Migrants and the Creation of Rum," by Jordan Buchanan Smith, drew on rare books, legal records, plantation papers, deeds, and secondary literature to detail the invention of

rum on the Caribbean island of Barbados between 1627 and 1650. Instead of attributing the creation of this new alcoholic beverage (which quickly became an economically important commodity) to a single group of inventors, Smith argued that rum was the product of the convergence of at least four distinct knowledge cultures on the small island. In essence, the invention of rum was a result of Atlantic migration within the Americas and from Europe and Africa.

Panel B, “(Im)Mobility Regimes: Geopolitical Calculations and Migrants’ Tactics,” started off with Stacy Fahrenthold’s paper “Banning Muslims by Executive Order: Immobilizing Ottoman Migrants through the Passport Regime in the United States, 1918-1924.” During World War I, the United States imposed travel restrictions on immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, prompting legal questions about whether the empire’s non-Muslim migrants should be exempted. This paper examined U.S. laws exempting Syrian Arabs from wartime travel restrictions. It revealed a passport program that created a post-Ottoman “Syrian” nationality, influencing how nationality was granted in the Middle East after 1918. The second paper, by Lily Balloffet, reported on her research project “Negotiating Exclusion: Arab Migration, Ethnicity, and Borders in Central America, 1890-1970.” Balloffet examined Middle Eastern migrants who circulated through the Caribbean Basin in the twentieth century. Numerous state policies aimed to regulate or stem migrant mobility. Balloffet’s study aimed to contribute to a larger history of ethnic exclusion on a hemispheric scale and bring focus to a traditionally overlooked geography of Arabic-speaking migrants in the Americas.

Panel C was devoted to the topic “Displacement, Refuge: The Epistemological Stakes of Internal Migration.” Risto Lenz’s paper discussed the topic “‘Where do we go from here?’ Government-sponsored Folk Song Collecting and the Migrant Experience during the Great Depression.” Defining folklore as a knowledge category, Lenz argued that government-sponsored folk song collecting under the auspices of the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) had an impact on the preservation and dissemination of migrant voices. Focusing on two WPA projects in California, Lenz discussed the shift in folklore scholarship from an interest in pioneer culture towards an interest in contemporary folk cultures. In the panel’s second paper, “Migrant Epistemologies in Unstable Times: Identity and Allocated Scarcity in Germany and India, 1945-1952,” Avi Sharma compared the cases of postwar Berlin from 1945-48 and post-Partition Calcutta between

1947-1952 to better understand the ways that both “identity” and “vulnerability” constitute systemic exclusions. By focusing on strategies for securing livelihoods and the logics of solidarity and difference in the context of mass displacement, Sharma also highlighted the unstable boundaries between different categories of migrants.

Panel D dealt with “Migration and the Making of Disciplines: The Study of Mass Culture.” In her paper “Debating race: The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the experience of migration and the production of knowledge in 1970s and 1980s Britain,” Almuth Ebke focused on the role that the terms “race” and “race relations” have played in British sociological research since the 1950s, even though the exact way they were understood has changed over time. Using the discussions about race at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham and the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) as case studies, she argued that the researchers connected to the CCCS challenged essentialist understandings of “race,” while militant researchers at the IRR championed a neo-Marxist analysis of race relations. These debates thus reveal a scholarly discipline that challenged epistemological premises. They also represent one step in the internal decolonization of the United Kingdom. Joseph Malherek offered his views on “Critical Theory as Displaced Knowledge: Émigré Intellectuals from Central Europe and Their American Sponsors, 1933-45.” He examined the humanistic values and personal motivations that led officers of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars to assist exiles from National Socialism. Officers’ values, he argued, determined the scholarship of beneficiaries, among whom were Max Horkheimer and his Institute of Social Research as well as Paul Lazarsfeld and his Bureau of Applied Social Research.

The final panel, “Migrant Knowledges: The Making of More than German Histories,” showcased Onur Erdur’s paper “Political and Historical Knowledge of Migrants: The Case of the German Reunification 1989/90.” Erdur explored the issue of migrants’ political and historical knowledge in the context of the German culture of remembrance and politics of memory. He examined migrant memories and representations of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and German reunification in 1990, with a focus on Turkish migrants in West Berlin. Erdur argued that this approach not only constitutes a contribution to Germany’s migration history but also offers an opportunity to practice contemporary history through the lens of

migration. Marcia C. Schenck's paper "Remembering from Below, Forgetting from Above: Legacies of Mozambican and Angolan Labor Migration to the German Democratic Republic 1979-1990" analyzed the history of labor migration from Angola and Mozambique to the German Democratic Republic and back as remembered by the former migrants a quarter century after their return. Schenck showed that their nostalgic memories serve to criticize the present governments for their failure to deliver on their promises of industrialization, work, and a stable future.

During the forum, the issue of how to conceptualize agency from a history of knowledge perspective remained a contested terrain. It is definitely a question worthy of further exploration. This became evident, for instance, in our discussions of the issues of migrants' empowerment through knowledge or migrants' informal economic strategies, which some observers interpret as creativity capable of dynamizing the more institutionalized societal order they encounter.

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