

MATERIAL- IZING THE TRANSI- ENT

ETHNOGRAPHIES AND
MUSEUMS IN THE STUDY OF
(FORCED) MIGRATION



Materializing the Transient Ethnographies and Museums in the Study of (Forced) Migration

May 13–16, 2020



Materialität der Migration

Organised by

Antonie Fuhse
Friedmann Yi-Neumann
Anoush Masoudi
Andrea Lauser
Joachim Baur
Peter Bräunlein

Materiality is a fundamental dimension of migration which is closely linked to temporality and has only recently made its way into the scope of migration research. During journeys of migration, people take things with them, or they lose or find things along the way. Journeys themselves are framed by objects like borders, passports, tents and other camp infrastructures, boats, and not least mobile phones. For people on the move, some of these things can arouse memories, some are linked with powerlessness or loss, some with hopes and aspirations, while other things lose their relevance along the way. This conference is hosted by the BMBF-funded research project "On the materiality of (forced) migration", which aims to study the material dimension of hopes and expectations that characterize experiences of migration. Based at the University of Göttingen, the research project is a collaboration between the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Museum Friedland, and the exhibition agency Die Exponauten.

The conference aims to bring together the findings of studies of the material dimensions of (forced) migration in different settings around the world. Presentations should draw on theoretically grounded ethnographic case studies based on thick descriptions.

Five main themes will structure the conference. They will be both treated individually in dedicated panels and workshops and brought together and intertwined systematically:

- Temporality is a decisive aspect of the relationship between materiality and (forced) migration and will thus be an overall topic of panels and public lectures.
- Panel I will address the various methodological strengths, challenges, limits, and pitfalls of doing (forced) migration research.
- Migration and things, in many forms, evoke passionate reactions. Therefore, Panel II will address the emotions related to 'moving objects', in contexts of migration and public debates alike.
- Panel III will deal with representations of migration. Besides (social) media, this section will give particular focus to the museum as a changing zone of representation, reception, contact, and interaction.
- The material and temporal conditions of refugee camps will be subject of Panel IV. Here, the consequences of these political and logistic infrastructures will be explored.

Schedule

 [view online](#)

Thursday, May 14th, 15:00-18:00 CEST (14:00 BST; 09:00 EDT)

Panel I: Emotions

Thursday, May 14th, 17:30-20:30 CEST

Panel II: Methods

Friday, May 15th, 12:00-14:30 CEST (18:00 HKT)

Panel III: Representations

Friday, May 15th, 15:00-18:00 CEST (09:00 EDT)

Panel IV: Camps

Saturday, May 16th, 15:00-17:00 CEST (09:00 EDT)

Concluding session

The conference will take place online, via the projects web page

> <https://materialitaet-migration.de/en>

Conference Keynote

Georgina Ramsay
(University of Delaware)

Materializing Transformative Future

What would it mean to treat the destabilizing effects of migration not as a problem, but as a force of possibility; a provocation for us all to imagine transformative futures? What distinguishes the migrant from the settled; the transience of movement from the permanence of residence? Conventionally, scholars have located the distinction between migrants and settled people within the material conditions of everyday life: the different relationships that migrants have with place and space, the instability of worlds disrupted by conflict and war versus the assumed solidity of life within a residential frame. These states, transient and settled, have been treated as fundamentally separate, mutually exclusive. In short, the migrant exists in anthropological scholarship as an exceptional figure. There is no coevalness between the migrant “other” and the settled counterpart. Except, when we consider the transience of migration from a temporal lens, such separations are collapsed, or at least blurred. This is because people move not simply to re-establish their lives in new and presumably more stable places, but do so to pursue aspirational horizons, futures of possibility. Whether fleeing war or poverty, or categorized as ‘forced’ migrant or ‘illegal’ alien, aspirational futurity motivates migration, just as it motivates those who

are settled to pursue opportunities in their own lives. Migration is just one trajectory through which a future of possibility is materialized; or, at least, could be. What distinguishes the migrant from the settled, then, is not just the disparate material conditions of transience and permanence, but how migrants experience the temporality of their lives. People I have conducted ethnographic research with who are in various states of migration—yet to move, on the move, re-settled elsewhere—are acutely familiar with the probability of a future of decline. For them, migration is one way to seek possibility within the precarity. In a period in which future stability is being revealed across the globe as an illusion, I argue here that we would benefit from re-framing the aspirational horizons of migrants—and the ways their movements disrupt world orders and bordering structures like the North/South divide—not as a destabilizing ‘problem,’ but as provocation to for us all to imagine and seek futures of possibility and transformation.

Panel II

[view online](#)

EMOTIONS

Keynote

Maruška Svašek
(Queen's University Belfast)

Discussant

Georgina Ramsay
(University of Delaware)

Convenor / Chair

Peter Bräunlein
(University of Göttingen)

Contributors

Victoria Kumala Sakti
Magdalena Suerbaum
Radhika Moral



This panel focuses on the complex intertwining of migration, material culture, and emotions. Migration and the dynamics of "de/territorialization" result in multiple attachments and detachments (Svašek 2012). Human mobility, no matter whether forced or voluntary, usually leads to intense emotional and transformative experiences shaped by materiality. In this process, objects and images "move"

in a double sense: they both stir emotions and also "entail the movement of people and things," as Basu and Coleman assert (2008:317).

Things may contain personal and collective memories, recall loss, activate senses of belonging, facilitate transnational connectivity, and offer reliability in turbulent times. Certain objects and images can trigger affects and emotions such as trauma, despair, or homesickness, but also religious sentiments, hope, aspiration, and well-being. In host societies, public debates on the appropriate quality and amount of material and financial aid (clothes, food, housing) for refugees and asylum seekers can become highly emotional. Fierce disputes may arise regarding 'illegitimate' possessions of refugees, such as branded mobile phones and clothing. Hereby, material culture may also provoke affects such as resentment and social envy.

**Thursday
May 14th**
15:00–18:00
CEST


14:00 BST
09:00 EDT

Keynote

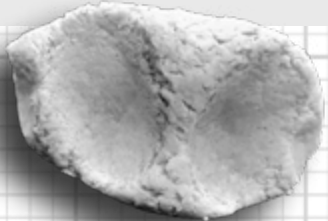
Maruška Svašek

(Queen's University Belfast)

Materiality, Proximity, and Distance: Covid-19, Mobility, and People-Thing Dynamics



Drawing on previous research into human mobility, emotional interaction and material mediation (Svašek 2018; 2016; 2012a; 2012b; Svašek and Komarova 2018), this talk explores how the current Coronavirus Crisis is influencing relations between people, places and things. How do people, many of them self-isolating, (fail to) create and negotiate sociality and well-being? In the process, how do material objects, including consumption goods, communication devices, and travel documents afford and mediate movements within, between and beyond people's dwellings? As people are struggling to find ways of dealing with the dynamic situation, to what extent do the meanings, values, and agency of specific objects change?



Victoria Kumala Sakti

(Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen)

The Social, Emotional, and Temporal Lives of Things in Exile Among the East Timorese

Magdalena Suerbaum

(Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen)

The Stroller, the Notebook, and the Plastic Bag: Mothering Practices among Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Berlin

Movements of objects, such as goods, money, and persons, across the borderlands of Indonesia and Timor-Leste have long featured the social fabric, weaving translocal families in this region together. This social fabric was disrupted when massive violence broke out during the latter's vote for independence from the former in 1999. Over two hundred thousand East Timorese people fled to neighbouring Indonesia for safety, with the majority gradually returning to their homeland. Tens of thousands remain on the Indonesian side of the border, in former refugee camps or in new settlements, where they live an exiled existence for, among other reasons, past political choices.

This paper draws on extensive and multi-sited ethnographic research among the East Timorese and explores the multiple meanings people ascribe to the material objects significant to life in exile. Specifically, it examines the trajectories and narratives attached to these objects, which range from those carrying personal sentiments and cultural importance to the corpses and bones of people who died in displacement, within and across national borders. At times, an object can travel across borders 'easily' as if having a 'life' of its own, encompassing people's aspirations for (re)connections with the homeland. Other times, however, movements of certain objects stir up intense emotions and debates as they carry painful memories of the past. In analysing the social, political, and emotional lives of objects, the paper ultimately discusses the ways people engage in 'materialising exile'.

What can a stroller, a notebook and a plastic bag filled with official documents tell us about the experiences of being a mother in times of forced migration? In this paper, I aim to analyse how motherhood and a precarious legal status are intimately related to objects of the everyday and trace which emotions are attached to them. Since December 2017, I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Berlin among refugees and asylum seekers and have witnessed the elevation of different objects. The stroller, for instance, held an exceptional position. It had the potential to bestow on women the status of a mother. Consequently, women, despite their precarious financial situations, invested a lot of effort to purchase one. A notebook requested by the child's primary school went through a similar process of elevation. Being able to find the notebook of the correct size and measure was much more than a simple purchase: it was a success story, a feeling of being in charge, and proof that one could be the committed and caring mother one aspired to be, despite the language barrier and the novelty of the school system in the host country. The plastic bag filled with official documents and letters that many women carried with them makes

Radhika Moral
(Brown University)

Migrants, Materialities, and Mobilities in the Brahmaputra Valley: Affect and Emotive Lives from the Chars

the most direct connection between objects, mothering, and a precarious legal status. Often, the papers that women produced from the bags were inquiries into the family situation by the youth welfare office, letters to the parents sent by their children's schools, and requests for information to calculate child allowance. The content of the plastic bag could evoke a plethora of emotions: powerlessness, fear, uncertainty, and outrage about the interference of the German state. With its focus on objects of the everyday and the emotions they were able to stir in mothers, this paper seeks to provide a new angle to the study of mothering practices in times of forced migration.

My paper seeks to examine the affective lives of cross-border migrants in the sandbanks (locally called chars and chaporis) of the Brahmaputra river, along Assam's western borderlands in India's northeast. This transregion shares borders and the river with the Mymensingh and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh, assuming a strategic frontier space prone to flooding. The paper attempts to probe the material politics of this migrant community's dependence on the river in these intertwined geographies of river and borderland territory and understand how the community necessarily reinvents itself even as it faces increasing surveillance and control by the state. Agrarian in nature, these migrants rely on the river that also shapes their everyday practices of farming and fishing. With the recently imposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), a large number of the state's population, many of whom are migrants and have apparently entered Assam post-1971, have been denied citizenship. I argue, that a bureaucratic/juridical enforcement has unleashed a condition of precarity whereby these marginal lives remain under constant scrutiny of the state. One of the key concerns of my paper is the migrant community's affective relationship with the land. While living lives of uncertainty, the community's attempts to embrace and belong in the culture of the state assumes significance through modes of adjustment and mobilities. In support of the above, I rely on certain collectives of poetry and songs (a genre called 'Miya poetry'), many of which express the community's present struggles and its cultural responses to the state. Though popular observations contend that the NRC has caused systematic deterritorialization and delegitimization of the community, many prior historical intimacies and antagonisms existing in the region complicate the discourse around citizenship. My paper thus also hopes to engage with the layered negotiations attending this contemporary crisis in Northeast India.

Panel I

[view online](#)

**Thursday
May 14th**
17:30–20:30 CEST

METHODS

Keynote

Marta Vilar Rosales (University of Lisbon)

Discussant

Sarah Mallet
(Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford)

Chair

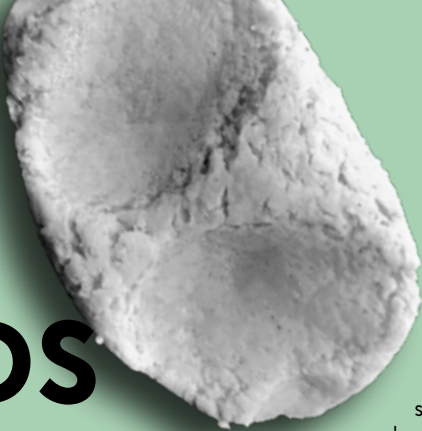
Antonie Fuhse (University of Göttingen)

Convenor

Friedemann Yi-Neumann (University of Göttingen)

Contributors

Rachel Barber
John Doering-White
Friedemann Yi-Neumann
Elena Höpfner



This session will ask to what extent perspectives on the materiality of (forced) migration require specific methodological, but also ethical, approaches in order to produce new and multifaceted social and personal insights into the complex field of everyday human–thing relations. We want to explore the (often not obvious) possibilities of material inscriptions and traces entailed in practical relations to things. But we are also interested in the pitfalls and ethical dilemmas faced by ethnographers who study such precarious and tense fields. Forced migration is characterized by the fact that many individuals have lost or left behind most of their belongings. People in such circumstances, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, need to develop new ways of living – a process that requires fundamental renegotiations of ties to people and material objects. Thus, the approaches we seek to discuss in this panel must be able to bring to light different ways of relating to things (familial, spatial, temporal, etc.) – regardless of whether they are at hand or out of reach.

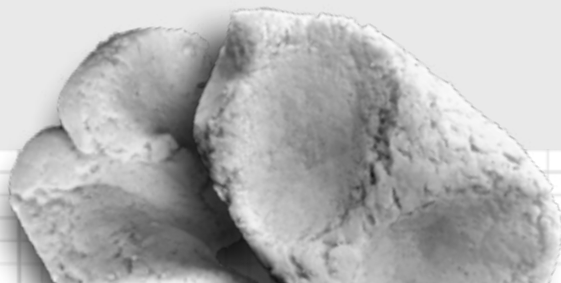
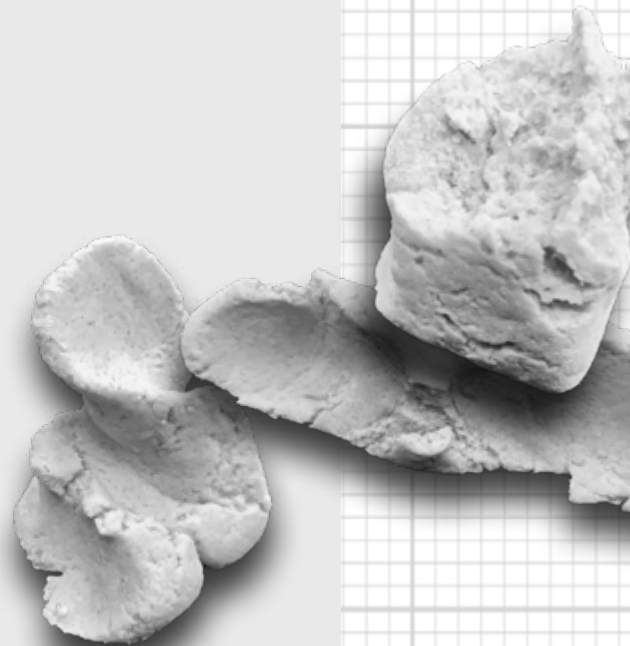
Keynote

Marta Vilar Rosales

(University of Lisbon)

On the materiality of migration: methods

This talk aims at presenting and exploring ethnographic approaches to the study of the materiality of migration. Drawing on current and previous ethnographic fieldwork carried out in different historical, spatial and cultural contexts of migration, and with different migration groups, the talk promotes a shared reflection on the potentialities and limitations of ethnographic approaches to the materiality of migration. The talk will particularly focus on two main topics: how to address materiality in general, and domestic materiality in particular, in the context of ethnographic fieldwork; and how to organize, classify and display the material objects gathered as a significant outcome of the research itself.



Rachel Barber
(University of Guadalajara, Mexico)

An Acquired Taste: Mexican Folk Art's Role in Boundary Negotiation and Cultural Adaptation Among American Migrants in Chapala, Mexico

The Lake Chapala region of Mexico is home to the largest community of American retirees outside the United States. While the significance of national boundary-crossing appears minimal in this superficially easy transition from U.S. mainland to American enclave, as in all cases of migration, the crossing of national borders implicates a complex constellation of social and cultural borders that have to be negotiated and redefined. One of the most striking indications of the redrawing of sociocultural boundaries is evidenced in the widespread consumption of Mexican folk art among American migrants. This newly acquired taste for Mexican folk art is significant not only because it indicates a radical change in the cultural affinity Americans had with Mexicans prior to arrival, but also because it points to the logic underlying the redefinition of social borders. As Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates in *Distinction* (1979), taste is a symbolic classification that serves a social purpose, reflecting and reinforcing individuals' "sense of place" in society. While there has been limited application of taste in migration studies, Marta Vilar Rosales highlights the potential consumption patterns have to reveal migrants' strategies of social positioning and integration. This non-traditional approach to analyzing migrant adaptation calls for new methodological strategies. Some of the methods employed in this investigation to apprehend the value assigned to Mexican folk art by American retirees include studying not only the type of Mexican crafts Americans consume in Chapala, but also the manner in which they are acquired, used, and displayed in their homes. Drawing from Bourdieu's and Mary Douglas' work on taste, this study assesses the material properties of the folk art migrants own, the immaterial associations it acquires, as well as Americans' social position in Mexico, in order to attain a situated understanding of Mexican folk art's social and cultural significance.

John Doering-White
(University of South Carolina)

¡Qué mamada! What a joke!: Humor and Hostility amid Mexico's shifting Migrant Hospitality Assemblage

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2017 in and around hospitality spaces across Mexico. This included participant observation as a volunteer at a humanitarian migrant shelter in Central Mexico and time spent in a welding workshop in Monterrey, a city in northern Mexico where growing numbers of Central Americans navigate tentative settlement as reaching the United States has become increasingly untenable. My central claim in this paper is that ironic, self-deprecating, and sexually charged humor, enacted materially through everyday objects like pickup trucks, coke bottles, and welding torches, are both ethico-moral signs and rhetorical strategies that men, whose experiences with undocumented migration are as different as they are similar, rely on to negotiate relations of hospitality where the line between empathy and exploitation is ambiguous. The following glimpses into everyday scenes of playful workplace banter reveal the importance of grounding such humorous ethnographic moments in everyday material contexts in order to understand how Central Americans and Mexican citizens navigate a shifting hospitality assemblage as Mexico, which has often been framed as a transit space, increasingly represents a space of tentative settlement for Central Americans facing forced displacement.

Friedemann Yi-Neumann
(University of Göttingen)

From Biographies to Biographical Horizons. On Life Courses and Things in Forced Migrations

Biographies of things and people have been a firm component of methods in material culture research; the (reflexive) potentials of the biographic approach have long been emphasized (Hoskins, 1998). The conceptual stagnation of this paradigm in the late 2000s (see Burström, 2014, p. 69) hardly hampered its empirical popularity. By referring to the respective scientific debates, along with the neglected work of Sergei Tret'iakov (2006 [1929]), I will show the potential of the biographical approaches. Based on the life stories and things of two women who fled Syria and made it to Germany, the diverging relevancies of their biographical objects will be discussed. Linear biographical narrations, though, tend to neglect the social and personal backgrounds and dis-/possessions against which things and life stories become or cease to be relevant. As a way forward, this chapter proposes a phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) and intersectional (Degnen & Tyler, 2017) lens on 'biographical horizons.' This concept can be considered a sensational enhancement of biographical approaches to material culture. It seeks to understand things and biographies by the modes of perception and practice as well as the broader societal conditions of the ones these things appertain to.

Elena Höpfner
(FU Berlin)

**Why should(n't)
refugees be asked
about their
possessions?
Methodological
strengths,
challenges and
pitfalls in the
application of
object-based
interviews in
forced migration
research**

In my paper I discuss the potential opportunities and challenges presented by the approach of object-based interviews in the research of forced migration. The debate is based on the results of my research in a refugee accommodation in Berlin (Höpfner 2018). The presence of and the interaction with possessions can create a dynamic interview situation. Possessions might be important prompts in helping respondents to recount important stories and to reveal their values, attitudes and ideas about the world. However, the shift of the attention focus towards the things may become a pitfall for both the researcher and the interviewee. The danger of triggering the feeling of talking about trivialities, as well as letting oneself to hide behind the things rather than facilitating focusing on the actual topic – these are some of the problematic aspects of this approach which I will be addressing.

Panel III

[view online](#)



The aim of this panel is to show how depictions of migration have changed over time, and also how to analyze current representations of migration and their social significance. The panel will discuss representations of (forced) migration in contexts such as museums, public discourse, and policies. We therefore welcome contributions that examine depictions in newspapers, books and other forms of media, artistic contexts, but also in political debates.

Friday
May 15th
12:00–14:30
CEST
18:00 HKT

REPRESENTATIONS

(Keynote withdrawn)

Discussant

Maruška Svašek
(Queen's University Belfast)

Convenor / Chair

Joachim Baur
(Die Exponauten)

Contributors

Sophia Suk-mun Law
Maike Suhr
Chi P. Pham
Ayşe Şanlı

In this session, (material) representation of migration in museum contexts deserves our special attention. As contact zones (Pratt, Clifford), museums are fields of encounter, debate, and confrontation. We will examine the role of museums as cultural and educational institutions and how they can impact public discourse and policies regarding migration. Ongoing changes to displays and forms of curatorial work should be considered in relation to their identity-forming functions, for example regarding representations in (permanent) exhibitions of historical and cultural-historical museums. Additionally, we seek to explore to what extent representations of migration and transculturality are related to dynamic issues of self-representation and the participation of migrant groups in these processes.

Sophia Suk Mun LAW
(Lingnan University)

Depiction of Vietnamese Boat People – Visual Documentations of Vietnamese Refugees

The exodus of the Vietnamese boat people in the last century marked one of the largest cases of forced migration in contemporary history. Because of its geographic location and unique political situation, Hong Kong played a significant role in this episode of modern exodus. The first group of Vietnamese boat people arrived in Hong Kong at the beginning of May 1975, and by the end of 1995, the region had taken in 223,302 refugees. Over 40 refugee camps were set up and a number of refugee policies were enacted to deal with the crisis. The chapter finally ended with its last refugee camp closing in 2000.

Depictions of refugees are often dominated by the representation of these people in the media and official reports, which can be subject to bias and political manipulation. Refugees' own voices, on the other hand, are mostly silenced, owing to both external and internal factors. Local media coverage of the 25-year Vietnamese refugee crisis in Hong Kong traces changes in local people's attitudes towards refugees. Equally, this coverage played a significant role in shaping how Vietnamese refugees were perceived outside of the camps. Between 1988 and 1991, a three-year art project called 'Art in the Camps' (AIC) was conducted for Vietnamese boat people inside the detention camps. It allowed them to present their own stories through images. By analysing images published in local newspapers between 1975 and 2000, as well as artwork collected by AIC, this paper aims to demonstrate how public representations of refugees often fail to account for the individuality and humanity of people who find themselves in a condition of forced displacement.

Maike Suhr
(Bauhaus-Universität Weimar)

The Circulating Knowledge. Why Popular Culture Matters in Exhibitions on Migration

BITTER THINGS – Narratives and Memories of Transnational Families (currently showcased at Historisches Museum Frankfurt) is a research-based exhibition project by the Berlin-based project space bi'bak, that explores the impact of labor migration on the notion of motherhood and family from the perspectives of women migrant workers and children left behind. The installation takes experiences of transnational families from the 1960s till today as a point of departure and brings narratives together with objects, which play a central role within the families.

Worldwide labor migration is creating new family models, that are often organized transnationally. Despite geographical distances, these families strive to maintain contact between the separated family members. In the time of the recruitment agreements in the 1960s, many parents were forced to leave their children behind since working hours were too demanding to make childcare possible on the side. Today it is predominantly migrant workers from Eastern Europe, who have to leave their families to earn a living in wealthier

Chi P. Pham
(University of Hamburg)

Material Power of Representations: Portraits of “Indians” in Contemporary Vietnam Media

countries. While sending presents on the one side means a way to fulfill traditional motherhood models, for the children these gifts are often hovering in an ambivalent, tension-laden zone, between memory, pain, hope, disappointment, and joy.

In addition to the objects and interviews, the exhibition also presents popular songs and music videos from different regions, in which the suffering of separated families but also explicitly the material level is addressed. The contribution reflects the difficulties of representing labor migration within an exhibition. In addition, the relevance and public presence of the theme in the popular culture of those countries affected by emigration are reflected on and contrasted with the representation in the museum.

In present-day Vietnam, the foreign population group which is normally addressed as “Indians” can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes the ones who are descendants of Indians, those who, since the second half of the nineteenth century, migrated from French-British India to then Indochina - Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The second group is the Indians, who have migrated into Vietnam since the unification of the country in 1975, and more emphatically since the introduction of the policy of *đổi mới* in 1986 when there was an increase in economic, educational and military partnerships between Vietnam and India. This paper examines the presentations of “the Indians” who have migrated to Vietnam since the time of Reform in comparison with the presentation of Indians who belong to the first group. Relying on Vietnamese data (newspaper, poster, administrative document, and film) collected in Vietnam, particularly at People Committee’s Archive Centers and libraries in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, in 2013-2015, the paper points out a critical reversal in presenting the Indians in contemporary Vietnam media. The paper aims to understand how the critical changes in the presentations of Indians reflect and develop political and economic conflicts among the Indian groups who belong to different waves of migration to Vietnam. In other words, such change potentially influences Vietnam’s policies on the Indian migrants, indicating and developing the ethnic and economic dynamism and complicatedness among the Indian population in Vietnam.

Ayşe Şanlı
(Brown University)

From the Shore to the Museum: An Odyssey

This paper explores the processes, ethics, and (im)possibilities involved in curating an exhibition on the issue of the so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe. Particularly, the paper reflects on a particular exhibition that will take place at Brown University's Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology (Providence, RI, USA). The curatorial team, which I am part of, is currently aiming at opening the exhibition in late February 2020. The exhibition invites the visitors to pay attention to the objects that migrated and crossed borders together with humans, collected from the island of Lesbos, Greece over the past few years. Tentatively titled *Transient Matter*, some of the questions that the exhibition addresses are as follows: How can contemporary anthropology and archaeology, as engaged practices, contribute to the public debates on global, forced, and undocumented migration? What is to be done with the material remnants of border crossing, often designated as "trash" and as "environmental pollution?" How are we to exhibit them without resorting to the aestheticization of the border crossing experience? The paper, hence, follows the transformation/afterlife of objects from the shore to the museum and reflects on the intended affective/sensorial impact of the exhibition and the limits of conventional ways of displaying objects in a museum setting. Moreover, it deals with the issue of how to portray this "crisis in Europe" to an "American" audience, which comprises academic and general publics from different ages and backgrounds.

Panel IV

[view online](#)

Friday

May 15th

15:00–18:00 CEST

09:00 EDT

CAMPS

Keynote

Simon Turner
(University of Copenhagen)

Discussant

Simona Pagano
(Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences)

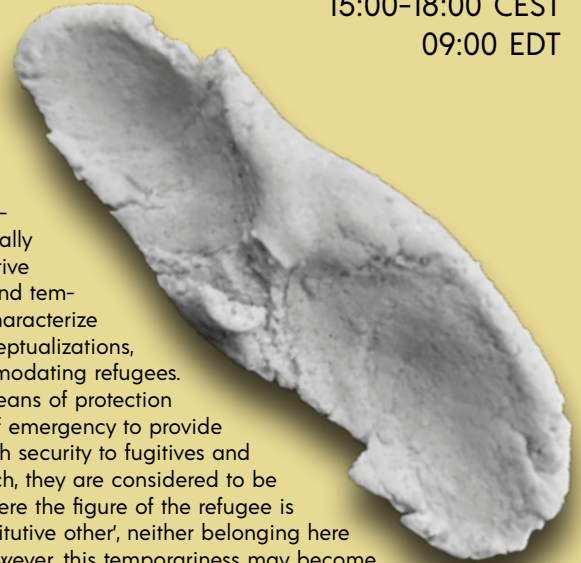
Convenor / Chair

Andrea Lauser
(University of Göttingen)

Contributors

Carna Brkovic
Elsa Mescoli
Sarah Mallet & Luise Fowler
Yaatsil Guevara Gonzalez

Globally, the (large-scale) accommodation of millions of refugees has become a major challenge. This panel will focus on empirically grounded and comparative studies of the material and temporal dimensions that characterize the different forms, conceptualizations, and practices of accommodating refugees. Refugee camps are a means of protection deployed in situations of emergency to provide physical, food, and health security to fugitives and displaced people. As such, they are considered to be transient settlements, where the figure of the refugee is constructed as the 'constitutive other', neither belonging here nor there. In practice, however, this temporariness may become quasi-permanent – a permanent exception (Agamben) – not only for individual refugees but because camps may continue to exist for years or even decades. Camps produce paradoxical, ambivalent situations and settings: spatially and materially, camps have boundaries, physical barriers, and other forms of material and social forms of containment that separate populations and create a distinction between 'insiders' (camp residents) and 'outsiders' (locals). In everyday practices, however, the limits and boundaries are permeable, allowing people, goods, things, and ideas to cross.



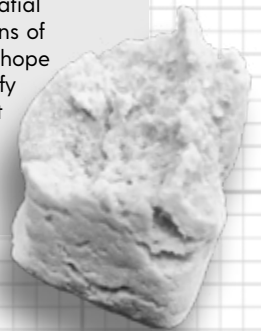
Keynote

Simon Turner
(University of
Copenhagen)

Stuckness and Connectedness in Camps

Refugee settlements, shelters, hotspots, etc are often the favourite means for authorities (states, UN agencies, NGOs) to deal with mobile populations that are seen as matter out of space. With their clearly demarcated borders, their monotonous housing and grid-like infrastructures, they stick out from their surroundings and give us the impression of being exceptional spaces. Often, those who inhabit them, do so against their will; they are forced into the confinement of the camps, where their lives are put on hold while they wait for others to make decisions on their futures. We would assume that the camp as a place of waiting and confinement surely leads to a sense of stuckness for those who are forced to live there. However, we should not let the aesthetics of the camp – its straight lines and monotonous housing – lead us to assume that life in the camps is simply set on stand-by. Similarly, we should not assume that the official objective of confinement – of stopping movement – is achieved. Empirical, ethnographic studies reveal that

life in camps is more complex. While camps might at first sight signal immobility, they may also act as junctions for onward mobility. They may be perceived – and used – as stepping stones or waiting rooms for onward mobility. This is what my colleagues and I have termed ‘carceral junctions’; places that simultaneously incarcerate and connect. Related to this, we must not assume a link between physical immobility and stuckness, just as we must not equate mobility with freedom and agency. Carceral geographers like Dominique Moran have pointed out that movement can be equally incarcerating. In my keynote speech I will try to unpack the concepts of confinement, stuckness and (im) mobility in relation to camps. Central to my talk will be to add temporality to a debate that easily lends itself to spatial analyses. I will discuss how questions of anticipation – both in the sense of hope and in the sense of despair – qualify the sense of stuckness, arguing that stuckness is a question of whether one is able to see possible futures.



Carna Brkovic
(University of Göttingen)

From Sovereignty to Mandate, and Back Again. Games with Responsibility in a Refugee Camp in Southeast Europe

In this paper, I suggest that contemporary refugee camps in Southeast Europe present places governed by the logic of the mandate, rather than by sovereignty – neither in its classical state form nor by the “mobile sovereignty” of the humanitarian-military apparatus. I do so on the basis of historical and ethnographic research of Konik camp in Montenegro, a UNHCR-supported refugee camp for Roma and Balkan Egyptians who lived there between 2000 and 2018, since escaping from the war violence in Kosovo. The focus of my paper is on the negotiations over who has the responsibility to maintain accommodation, healthcare, and education in the Konik refugee camp that had been going on between the state institutions, the international and national humanitarian organizations (UNHCR and the Montenegrin Red Cross), the EU, and the camp residents. If sovereignty means being able to decide on the state of the exception, the Konik camp was governed by the logic of the mandate, which meant being able to decide on what falls beyond the scope of your responsibility. All the relevant institutional actors operating in the camp followed the same logic: The humanitarians decided that anything beyond the maintenance of the existing camp infrastructure fell beyond their mandate; the state decided that anything beyond project partnership fell beyond its scope of responsibility (i.e. a “mandate”); the EU ignored its own responsibility for the very existence of the Konik camp (which was established as a reflection of the EU border regime, in order to prevent the displaced from seeking refuge in Italy), but it assigned the responsibility for the durable solutions to the Montenegrin state institutions. The logic of the mandate did not produce the state of the exception, but gaps in governance that made life unliveable. The logic of the mandate emerged in this context because of the specific understanding of statehood in Southeast Europe as continuously under development.

Elsa Mescoli
(University of Liège)

Negotiating (Food) Identity in the Context of Forced Displacement and Unstable Settlement: Reflections on the Culinary Practices of Undocumented Migrants in Liège.

Within the framework of a research project focused on the public opinion about refugees and asylum seekers, it was possible to gather relevant data about the way in which food – among other cultural practices – enables migrants to find a place in the context of forced displacement and unstable settlement. In particular, through ethnographic research and the micro-analysis of the materiality of cooking, I could explore the preparation of meals for the local population by a group of undocumented migrant women living in Liège as means to take an active role in the life of the city, in spite of being excluded from it in terms of legal status and rights. Through preparing food at local events and through interacting with local organisms (associations, services, institutions) that set the conditions for these activities to develop, undocumented migrant women position themselves as active subjects contributing to local dynamics. While doing this, they negotiate their cultural belonging and food traditions by mixing them with new local practices. As an example, I will analyse the organization of some tables d'hôtes in the house that these women are occupying. The prepared meals combine sub-Saharan African culinary traditions with local recipes and values. In fact, specifically in the neighbourhood where this activity takes place, ecological preoccupations drive food habits in terms of supplying practices and cooking methods.

The exploration of this (and other) example(s) shows how food – and sharing food in particular – can be the material and discursive site for establishing relevant relationships and claiming rights. To do that, food habits need to be adjusted to the local environment. Undocumented migrants, whose demand for permanent stay in Belgium has been rejected and who find themselves lacking civic rights, manage to find a place in the society where they live thanks to the performance of cultural practices involving local people and engaging with contextual dynamics.

Sarah Mallet

(Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford)

Louise Fowler

(Museum of London Archeology)

Dzhangal and Lande: two archaeological approaches to the study of Forced Migration.

This paper is an archaeological investigation of the 'Jungle', the infamous refugee camp in Calais in Northern France. We explore both the material dimension of contemporary migration and the new experimental regimes of state borderwork at Calais as enforced by the French and British states, and we have reimagined archaeology and anthropology as methods to make visible what would otherwise stay hidden by the politics of the present. By examining the material culture of the camp through the lens of archaeology, our innovative approach accounts for the *longue durée* political, cultural, historical, and social trends that led to 10,000 people living in a refugee camp in Northern France in 2015 and 2016. We will present work from two different but complementary 'collections': the first is the assemblage collected in the camp by photographer Gideon Mendel and the second is the collection currently on display at the Pitt Rivers Museum as the major temporary exhibition 'Lande: the Calais 'Jungle' and Beyond'. We will discuss how the materials were collected, photographed and displayed, as well as our continuing work on how they are represented, both as an archaeological collection and a museum display.

Through archaeological practices and methodologies, both the Dzhangal and the Lande projects have contributed to an understanding of the camp through the study of artefacts from the site to reveal the complex human networks in and around Calais. It has also allowed us to develop a reflexive approach to our methodologies for dealing with archaeological and museum collections. We argue that by using the spaces of ethnography and the 'archaeology of the contemporary', we will provide new voices in our representation of forced migration in Europe today and render visible the landscape of the U.K./ French border at Calais.

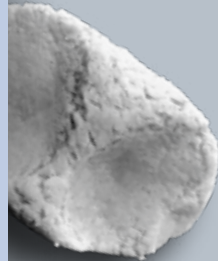
Yaatsil Guevara González
(University of Bielefeld)

**Transient Homes:
Dynamics of
Confinement and
Home-Making
Practices Among
Honduran Refugees
in Current Southern
Mexico.**

The Caravan of thousands of Honduran migrants crossing Guatemala and Mexico trying to reach the U.S. in October 2018, was the pinnacle of the ongoing "migration crisis" among the Central American-U.S. migratory corridor for at least ten years. Although Mexico was categorized as a "transit country" in the past, now the most urgent challenges in this country are focused on providing humanitarian aid and developing recognition and integration policies for thousands of people from Central America. Most of them are now seeking refuge in Mexican territory. In this context, migrant shelters, which had traditionally served as a place of passage where migrants mainly received humanitarian aid, have become an art of refuges.

Migrant shelters are located throughout Mexico and they have become 'transient homes' for mainly thousands of Honduran migrants. These migrant persons are 'stuck' for months in those places, waiting for their asylum resolutions, or any other possibility to get on the move again. In this context, the aim of this paper is to discuss the transient practices of home-making, but also the practices of "human differentiation" (Hirschauer, 2017) arising from everyday life of confinement. Here, I discuss how migrants cope with daily life in conditions of restricted mobility and prolonged uncertainty, and how they reconstruct their notions of home-making and 'the other'. The empirical information presented in this article is based on collaborative ethnographic research, carried out between 2014 and 2016 at "La 72-Hogar Refugio para personas migrantes" in Tenosique, Mexico.

POSTER



PRESENTATIONS

Katharina Brunner
Maliheh Bayat Tork
Karina Jäschke
Veronika Reidinger
& Anne Unterwurzacher
Philipp Hartung
Bùi Kim Đĩnh
Samah Al Jundi-Pfaff



Katharina Brunner
(University of Göttingen)

Making Sense in a Transforming World: The Power of Objects in Changing Situations

How do people move forward in circumstances that are apparently determined by more obstacles than solutions? In situations of change that migration often brings with itself, the materials people carry with them along their way can often help to make it through these difficult times: They remind them of their experiences, families, relatives, people they've met on their way and the faith or values they believe in. The following stories show in which ways objects can act as 'sense makers' and motivational forces that provide people with hope, a sense of stabilizing continuity and the courage to carry on in life, no matter how rapidly (material) landscapes, people, or social norms change.

Maliheh Bayat Tork
(University of Göttingen)

Living Enforced Exile and Enforced Materiality

Looking at humanitarian relief materiality as a kind of forced materiality, the research puts forth an analysis of how enforced displacement and enforced materiality are interconnected and seeks to find the effect of humanitarian materiality on cultural practices and to discover the intersections between exilic relief materiality and embodied aspects of forced migration.

Karina Jäschke
(University of Göttingen)

'Agency as access' - How material things impact on human agency in contexts of migration

Focusing especially on material things, this poster seeks to take a closer look at how different human and non-human actors are entangled and influence each other's agency in various ways. The perspective presented here is based on a working concept of 'agency as access' that I have developed in my BA-thesis, combining the idea of 'social navigation' (Henrik Vigh) with the 'Actor-Network-Theory' (Bruno Latour). With this concept, agency can be understood and used as a methodic-theoretical lens for investigating contexts of migration, in which materiality always determines people's 'access' to opportunities for action.

**Veronika Reidinger
& Anne Unterwurzacher**

(Ilse Arlt Institut for
Social Inclusion Research)

**(Not) in the luggage?
About bringing along,
leaving behind and
purchasing new things
of the household in the
context of flight and
displacement, (1945/2015).**

This research analyses the meaning of things for refugees and displaced persons they brought along, left behind or purchased. It focuses on two different refugee movements: flight and displacement of the German-speaking population of Czechoslovakia after the second world war and recent refugee movements around 2015. With a biographical approach, we analyse how things are or were used to shape daily lives, e.g. what role they play in the process of home-making, in establishing (material) continuity and social involvement.

Philipp Hartung
(University of Göttingen)

**Emptiness as an Exception
in Friedland Transit Camp**

In July 2019 FTC Friedland saw a shift from asylum seekers to refugees from humanitarian admission programs as the main group for accommodation and care. This poster seeks to answer how the welfare organizations in Friedland handled this shift of their main clientele and also the prior month-long absence of refugees. What can this exceptional emptiness of GDL Friedland show about the routines and motives of the institutionalized aid work with refugees?

Bùi Kim Đĩnh
(University of Göttingen)

Circular migration in transnational art

The poster will examine an experience on circular migration between two countries in Vietnam's visual art. Being a refugee in Los Angeles returning to Saigon, Dinh Q.Lê's art is constructed from collective memories of Vietnamese boat people living in the USA and southern Vietnamese living in Vietnam. By interweaving and mingling new and old photographs, the artist exposes a peripheral history which is unfavourable to both countries.

Samah Al Jundi-Pfaff
(iEARN Syria Coordinator,
Museum Friedland)

Let's Make It

The LET'S MAKE IT project welcomes the residents of Friedland Transit Camp and mirrors the ever-changing social and cultural fabric of it. The activities are committed to creating and maintaining a safe place where the participants talk, paint, learn the history of the camp, tell their stories, and join the global cross-cultural dialogue on flight, displacement, migration and integration. At Let's Make It stories are born and seen in colors and words which visualize openness, mindfulness, empathy, and the sense of belonging to the community and to the personal story. Since August 2016, the multi-layered cultural program of Museum Friedland creates the bridge that leads the residents of the camp to visit the collection which reflects and echoes 70 years of history.
www.museum-friedland.de

On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration is a cooperation of three partners: The Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Göttingen, the Museum Friedland and the Berlin-based exhibition agency "Die Exponauten. Exhibitions et cetera."

From September 2018 to July 2021, the three partner institutions, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, are developing different perspectives on specific human-thing relations in the context of flight and migration processes.



Materialität der Migration



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung



GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
Institut für Ethnologie und
Ethnologische Sammlung
Theaterplatz 15
37073 Göttingen

layout and design researchdesign.de
with design input from neuerituale.com