



Materiality of Migration

Call for Papers:

“Materializing the Transient: Ethnographies and Museums in the Study of **(Forced) Migration**”

Göttingen, May 13–16, 2020

About the conference

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.
- The material and temporal conditions of refugee camps will be subject of Panel III. Here, the consequences of these political and logistic infrastructures will be explored.
- Panel IV 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.

Important information on time and place

The conference will take place from May 14–16 in Göttingen, Germany. Parts of the conference will be held at Friedland transit camp (GDL), which still serves as a reception center for refugees.

Call for Papers

We invite abstracts (250–300 words) for presentations related to the topics of Panels I–IV. Abstracts should be sent to the project's coordination team, Friedemann Yi-Neumann and Antonie Fuhse (matmig@sowi.uni-goettingen.de), by October 31, 2019. We will advise of acceptance by October 31, 2019. Funds may be available to support travel and attendance in specific cases.

Please note that we plan to publish a conference volume around the beginning of 2021. In order to facilitate formative discussions, we require contributors to submit manuscripts for circulation prior to the conference. The deadline for submission of manuscripts will be January 31, 2020.



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Organizing committee:

Prof. Dr. Andrea Lauser (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Göttingen)

Prof. Dr. Peter Bräunlein (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Göttingen)

Dr. Joachim Baur, Die Exponauten, Berlin

Dr. Serena Müller (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Göttingen)

Antonie Fuhse, M.A. (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Göttingen)

Friedemann Yi-Neumann, M.A. (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Göttingen)

Panel descriptions:

Materializing the Transient

Panel I: Methods

Keynote: Marta Vilar Rosales (University of Lisbon)

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.

Panel II: Emotions

Keynote: Maruška Svašek (Queen's University Belfast)

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.**



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Panel III: Camps

Keynote: Simon Turner (University of Copenhagen)

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.

Panel IV: Representations

Keynote: Burcu Dogramaci (LMU München)

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. 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.