

Call for Papers

German Migrants and Migrating Knowledge in Latin American History

Conference at the German Historical Institute in Washington D.C., November 3-5, 2022

Conveners: Simone Lässig, Mario Peters (both GHI Washington D.C.), H. Glenn Penny (University of Iowa), Stefan Rinke (Freie Universität Berlin)

Many millions of German-speaking migrants left Europe over the last two centuries. While the great majority of those Germans traveled to North America, the second most common destination was Latin America. Argentina, Brazil, and Chile were their most frequent destinations, but German migrants could be found throughout Central and South America. Scholars pursuing contributionist histories at the end of the twentieth century frequently underscored that Germans' influence in host societies far outweighed their numbers. More recently, others have demonstrated that German migrants created and settled in communities that were locally grounded, inherently diverse, and interconnected. By the beginning of the twentieth century, networks of German banking, business, finance, shipping lanes, telegraph lines, and overland trade combined with ubiquitous German-language newspapers and periodicals tied those disparate communities together. They also linked them to German-speakers in the United States. Those interconnections frequently offered German migrants and their host societies tremendous advantages. They tied them into vast, transatlantic and multidirectional flows of knowledge.

One goal of this conference is to build awareness of the entangled histories of German migrants across the Americas; another is to better understand the implications of those entanglements for our narratives of the histories of Germany and the Americas. In the past, the histories of German emigration and immigration to the Americas have usually been written within the confines of nation-states (Germans in Argentina, Germans in Canada, Germans in Honduras, etc.). Entire historiographies, in English, German, Portuguese, and Spanish have emerged within those national frameworks, and there has been strikingly little dialogue between them. Of course, Germans in the Americas were not an isolated ethnic group, although some ethnopolitical entrepreneurs in Europe and the Americas tried to present them as such. Rather, they moved within multilingual and multiethnic contexts, living in transcultural communities made up of people from Europe, Africa, Asia, and of course a variety of indigenous peoples, all of whom participated in building and maintaining these networks and the local knowledge cultures they tied together.

Our conference seeks to initiate a dialogue among scholars in different research fields, including the history of migration, the history of knowledge, diaspora studies, the new ethnic studies, and refugee studies. We aim to build a broader understanding of rarely analyzed intertwined histories and knowledge flows by bringing together a group of leading scholars from Europe, Latin America, and North America who study the place of migrants' in the dynamics of knowledge production in Latin America with a special focus on Germanophone communities. Those eclectic and inclusive communities contained people from a wide mix of confessions, professions, and social classes. They stemmed from geographies ranging from western Europe through central, eastern, southeastern Europe as well as Russia and Asia. If they all spoke some form of German, the majority also were multilingual, and the vast majority migrated to Latin America to become, as Jan Plamper recently formulated it, German plus other things.

We have chosen to focus on Latin America for three primary reasons:

Firstly, the GHI Washington has long supported first-rate scholarship on the interconnections between Germany and the United States. We plan to build on that success and broaden its scope by extending its inquiries to the countries in the southern half of the western hemisphere. By inviting leading scholars from Germany, Latin America, and North America who have been working on migrants from German speaking Europe to Latin America, we aim not only to bring them into dialogue with each other but also with the community of GHI- associated scholars who work on the Germans in the United States.

Secondly, we want to expand this dialogue by inviting leading U.S.-based Latin Americanists who seldom focus on German migrants. Many are unaware of the scholarship on Latin America being produced by German scholars. By opening a conversation between representatives of these scholarly communities, we hope both to push the framework for studying German migrations beyond neocolonial or postcolonial questions and to rethink Latin American experiences of immigration and transnational immigrant communities.

Thirdly, the history of migrant knowledge in Latin America calls into question many of the tropes of migrant knowledge in the United States. That makes it a particularly fruitful space of inquiry for historians of migration. For example: Latin American nations generally welcomed German immigrants and, indeed, often actively encouraged Germans to immigrate. Many local elites coveted the knowledge German migrants brought with them. The Chilean state, for example, sought out German educators, scientists, technicians, even military men during the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. That was true in other states as well, and we know a great deal about German professionals bringing knowledge and skills with them to Latin America in order to build industries, institutions, and even nations. We know far less, however, about informal knowledge, and we know very little about landscapes that gave rise to hybrid constellations of knowledge production and new forms of knowledge.

Those constellations often encompassed actors and spaces not typically associated with knowledge-production – children, for example, who engaged in knowledge-production alongside adults on city streets. Knowledge carried by children and their parents could integrate with local knowledge cultures in transcultural spaces such as agricultural fields, city squares, markets, stores, and workshops. Migrant knowledge, in fact, came in many forms beyond those we have come to expect in the institutional settings that have received the lion's share of attention: practical, social, tacit, and even situational knowledge. Our conference will thus include discussion of actors and analytical categories, including gender, class, race/ethnicity, that rarely figure in studies of classic institutions of knowledge and knowledge-production.

What constituted newly migrated knowledge could vary across space and time. Another of our goals, then, is to develop a language for describing and analyzing modes of knowledge production and the production of knowledge within particular spaces, especially transcultural ones. That will have applications across the Americas and beyond.

The United States is an important point of reference because it was a central market place for the exchange of ideas in the nineteenth and, even more so, twentieth centuries. Actors from Germany and Latin America who participated in the creation and circulation of new knowledge about a seemingly “exotic” and marginal region in global networks frequently had networks in the United States. Although we will put an emphasis on Germans as knowledge-producers, we are also interested in the role of non-Western actors and other groups that have not yet received scholarly attention. Our approach will contribute to questioning a logic of diffusion emanating from Germany and the United States by looking at the role of alternative cultural resources.

Please upload a short CV and paper abstract of no more than 500 words **by 31 March 2021** at the GHI platform <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/1a4fad988a6841798455e4182cce9da1>.

Selected participants will receive an individually calculated lump sum to support travel expenses and accommodation costs of conference participants.

All papers will be pre-circulated in order to prioritize discussion. The deadline for submitting the conference papers will thus be at least one month before the conference, ideally 1 October 2022. The meeting will take place between 3 and 5 November 2022 and will be hosted by the German Historical Institute in Washington DC.

In case you have further questions, please contact Dr. Mario Peters at the GHI Washington (peters@ghi-dc.org)

Invited and Confirmed Participants:

Prof. Dr. Carlos Rodrigo Sanhueza Cerda, Universidad de Chile

Prof. Dr. Max Paul Friedman, American University

Prof. Dr. Jeffery Lesser, Emory University

Prof. Dr. Irina Podgorny, Universidad Nacional de la Plata