



Migrants as “Translators” : Mediating External Influences on Post World War II Western Europe, 1945-1973. Miriam Rürup, Institute for the History of the German Jews (IGdJ), Hamburg; Jan Logemann, German Historical Institute Washington (GHI Washington), 24.10.2013-26.10.2013.

Reviewed by Jan Logemann

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (February, 2014)

Migrants as “Translators”: Mediating External Influences on Post World War II Western Europe, 1945-1973

In the decades that followed the end of World War II, Western Europe experienced a period of rapid social and cultural transformation. This workshop set out to explore the ways in which returning European émigrés and other migrants contributed to and acted as mediators in this era of change. As entrepreneurs and scholars, government envoys and leaders of civil society organizations, migrants played an active part in facilitating the vibrant postwar exchange that connected disparate parts of the globe and shaped the rebuilding of Europe’s cities, the strengthening of its economies, and the “modernizing” of its societies. How did their migration experiences enable them to take on the role of “translators” either in a linguistic or in a broader cultural sense? To what extent can the examination of individual and group experiences with exile, migration, and return provide a fruitful lens through which to study postwar social change?

A keynote lecture and comment provided a methodological and thematic framework for the workshop. Coming from the field of cultural studies, DORIS BACHMANN-MEDICK (Gießen) challenged participants to view migration as a form of cross-cultural interruption, a series of ruptures and frictions during which individual migrants may in turns have the agency to act as “cultural brokers” or find themselves translated and defined by others. In discussing what she has termed the “translational turn,” Bachmann-Medick provided several theoretical models that migration scholars may find useful for analyzing the shifting and varied social contexts between which migrations and translations occur.

These included self-translation, the management of multiple belongings, and the use of a shared point of reference or third idiom – such as international human rights norms – by migrants to make their political or cultural claims heard. In history and migration research, as in cultural studies, she emphasized the importance of a less metaphorical and more empirically-grounded understanding of translation. NANCY L. GREEN (Paris) followed up on Bachmann-Medick’s lecture, commenting from a migration studies perspective that the conceptualization of migration as a series of ruptures may prove a good way to complicate overly simplified and cheerful narratives of transnationalism. Green noted the importance of considering complicating factors such as class and gender when looking at the power structures within a society that make possible or frustrate attempted translations. Certain professions, she observed, are characterized by an inherent translational quality, while the socioeconomic status of other migrants may make it near-impossible to participate actively in translation. Green also asked participants to reflect on which elements of the “translational turn” could provide useful new tools for researchers in migration studies and whether some of its concepts might not, under other names, already be present in the field.

The first day of the workshop focused on political translations by migrants in the Atlantic world in the aftermath of the war. The initial panel centered on individual Jewish émigrés who acted as “cultural brokers” in public discussions about the Holocaust. ELISABETH

GALLAS (Berlin) presented a look at Hannah Arendt's "return through writing" to participate as a Jewish voice in German postwar public debates about the country's Nazi past, as well as in Allied forces-backed efforts to recover Jewish cultural objects looted during the war. Through a close analysis of her writings, ANDREAS STUHLMANN (Hamburg) distinguished several translational modes in Arendt's transatlantic engagement; these included the weaving together of reflections on the European Enlightenment, political science, and individual historical experience to contribute to a shared cultural narrative, and, on a more literal level, the use of her position as an editor for a New York publishing house to recommend the translation and publication of the works of certain German and European authors, including Walter Benjamin. To conclude the panel, JAN LAMBERTZ (Washington) examined the detention on Ellis Island of the Jewish community activist Norbert Wollheim upon entry into the United States, highlighting the challenges that Cold War tensions created for cultural interlocutors as they moved between distinct and shifting political worlds. All three papers suggested that the reception of cultural processes of translation depends not only on the translations offered, but also on the acceptance – or not – of the migrant's authority by the wider society as a result of the individual's real or perceived political and cultural affiliations.

The panel that followed featured émigrés that were involved in the postwar reestablishment of cultural ties between the United States and Europe. Through an examination of German-American businessman Eric M. Warburg's role in the founding of the Atlantik-Brücke and the American Council on Germany, ANNE ZETSCHKE (Newcastle) suggested that diverse professional and personal contacts, coupled with experience in multiple cultures, put émigrés like Warburg in a unique position to forge elite networks and strengthen the emerging "Atlantic Community." BJÖRN SIEGEL (Hamburg) then traced the transatlantic career of shipping magnate Arnold Bernstein and his efforts to restore American-European shipping routes for both cargo and tourism. By enabling middle-class Americans to visit the continent, Bernstein contributed to shifting perceptions of Europe from a wartime battlefield to a resurrected center of culture. Both presentations highlighted the importance of social networks for successful cross-cultural transfers, but also raised questions about how to clearly define translation as a social practice.

The third panel offered a look beyond the Atlantic and examined political exchanges and translational pro-

cesses between Europe and the Global South during the 1960s and 1970s. HANNO PLASS (Berlin) shared his research on the anti-apartheid activism of members of South Africa's Jewish minority. Taking the example of the journalist Ruth First, Plass demonstrated how experiences with anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe shaped the social and political views of Jewish activists like First, and enabled her to internationalize the anti-apartheid cause while in exile in Great Britain. JADWIGA E. PIEPER-MOONEY (Tucson) then presented on the reception of Chilean political exiles in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the distinct ways in which the Chilean peaceful revolution and subsequent military coup was understood by GDR party elites, by members of solidarity groups, and by average East Germans. This was coupled with a look at the position of "translator" the exiles later assumed when conveying their experiences with socialism in practice after their return to Chile. Even within the highly transnational language of protest and activism, these papers acknowledge, there remained a need for translation and adjusting of messages to localized debates and cultures. By couching their struggle in the burgeoning international language of human rights, these migrant activists were able to amplify their message.

The second day of the workshop shifted the focus to migrants active in various professional fields. Translations in business and marketing stood at the center of the fourth panel. JAN LOGEMANN (Washington) assessed the transatlantic career of motivational researcher Ernest Dichter as part of a larger group of European émigré "consumer engineers" that were able to use their expert knowledge of European markets and psychologically-informed research methods to influence the development of mass consumption on both sides of the Atlantic. Turning to the field of advertising, CORINNA LUDWIG (Washington) then analyzed the cultural codes and market features unique to American and German automobile consumption that complicated the transfer and translation of the Volkswagen Beetle advertising campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In business, as with transnational protest movements, localized adaptation and awareness of the culture of a translation's intended audience were stressed as important elements of a successful translation. Both case studies furthermore sought to complicate traditional notions of the postwar "Americanization" of European consumption as a one way process, noting the multidirectional dialogue and creative synthesis between European-trained market researchers, American advertising experts, and companies from both

sides of the Atlantic.

The fifth panel opened a discussion on the way experiences with migration, exile, and displacement were portrayed in and experienced by those involved in creating contemporary popular culture. MIRIAM RÜRUP (Hamburg) explored representations of remigration and return in the early postwar films *Der Ruf* (*The Lost Illusion*) and *Long is the Road*, analyzing the challenges of negotiating on screen incredibly divisive and emotionally charged issues including wartime suffering and guilt, and the hopes and disappointments of returnees. JOACHIM SCHLÖR (Southampton) followed this with an examination of the way exile and return to Europe shaped the career of the German songwriter Robert Gilbert. The English language – the source of much of Gilbert’s frustration as he tried to write songs for an American audience – became an asset in his later career after returning to Europe as he translated multiple American musicals, including *My Fair Lady* and *Oklahoma*, into German. Both papers inquired about the potential limitations and misinterpretations of cross-cultural translation by highlighting not only the successes, but also the challenges migrants faced and instances of failed translations.

The role of remigrés in the postwar professionalization of European social work was the topic of the next panel. LAURA HOBSON FAURE (Paris) presented on the creation of the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work by the American Joint Distribution Committee and on the involvement of migrant experts – including several German exiles – in efforts to popularize “American” social work methods to France. BARBARA LOUIS (Minneapolis) then shared the case study of Gisela Konopka, a Jewish refugee from Germany, who became a translator of social work methods and practices – most notably social group work – through her position as an educator and consultant specialist sought out by the Allied High Commission to help rebuild German welfare services after the war. By considering migrant experts as translators rather than simple carriers of ideas, Louis suggested, historians acknowledge the individuals’ agency and active participation in the adjustment and moderation of transfers between cultures. Such an understanding can lead to a more nuanced understanding of processes of cultural and professional exchange. These papers also demonstrated different strategies experts chose in representing themselves and the methods they tried to advance as either “American,” “European,” or something in between.

The final panel examined the careers of several prominent émigré architects and urban planners who en-

gaged in postwar debates on the future of urban space. Looking at the diverse professional activities of Walter Curt Behrendt, Victor Gruen, and Hugo Leipziger-Pearce, ANDREAS JOCH (Washington) suggested that while planners of the period shared a professional language that to some extent bridged national divides, a secondary translation of planning ideas was often necessary to make them accessible to non-experts, including politicians and the average citizen. In this sense, contemporary planners made use of both the strategy of appealing to a cross-cultural “third language” and of localizing their message in an effort to make it resonate with the receiving society. TAMARA BJAŽIĆ KLARIN (Zagreb) analyzed Croatian-born Ernest Weissmann’s rise from an independent architect to the director of the United Nations Housing and Town and Country Planning Section, noting his continued dedication to the practice and spread of socially responsible architecture. Weissmann and the other planners discussed in this panel had well-defined social goals that included the protection of metropolitan city centers, the creation of high-quality housing for vulnerable individuals, and the fostering of democratic behavior. While these goals were maintained, more or less, as the planners crossed national borders, the methods used to pursue and to explain these aims often required translation to fit the cultural and historical context.

The concluding discussion underlined the potential usefulness of translational models of cultural analysis for histories of exchange and encounter. The research presented at this workshop provided an initial empirical test of these models. A renewed focus on the process rather than the outcome of translations leads to a more subtle understanding of cultural and professional dynamics and of the position of migrants within a society. “Translation,” it was suggested, is a more nuanced term than “transfer”; it brings in the complexity of language and the speaker’s anticipation of the reception of a message by a particular audience. However, a more well-defined typology of the different modes of translations would be useful, particularly when considering different types of migrants. To what extent can the same processes be seen among high- and low-skilled, forced and professional migrants? While migrants in certain professions, including marketing and pop culture, reflected explicitly on their roles as “cultural brokers,” for others, translation was simply an inherent part of everyday life. The translational turn, most participants agreed, may not revolutionize their research projects, but can open valuable new spaces to explore the nuance and friction of migrant experiences, and to better understand the agency of indi-

vidual historical actors.

This workshop was hosted by the Institute for the History of the German Jews (IGdJ) in cooperation with the German Historical Institute (GHI) Washington's *Transatlantic Perspectives* project, the website for which was presented during the workshop. *Transatlantic Perspectives*, <www.transatlanticperspectives.org>. We are grateful for everyone whose hard work made this workshop possible and for the support of the Institute for the History of the German Jews, the GHI Washington, and the German Federal Ministry of Research and Education.

Conference Overview:

MIGRATION AND TRANSLATION

Keynote

Doris Bachmann-Medick (University of Gießen), Migration and Translation

Nancy L. Green (EHESS Paris), Comment from a Migration Studies Perspective

JEWISH ÉMIGRÉS IN THE POSTWAR ATLANTIC WORLD

Panel I - Translating Germany after the Holocaust: The Role of Jewish Émigrés

Chair/Comment: Miriam Rürup (IGdJ, Hamburg)

Elisabeth Gallas (Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin), "Es kommt nur auf die Wahrheit an": Hannah Arendt in Postwar Germany

Andreas Stuhlmann (University of Hamburg), Hannah Arendt: On Storytelling and the Task of the Translator

Jan Lambertz (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington), Postwar Germany on the "Isle of Tears"

Introduction to the Transatlantic Perspectives Project
Lauren Shaw (GHI Washington)

Panel II - Building Bridges: Émigrés in an Emerging "Atlantic Community"

Chair/Comment: Isabella Löhr (University of Basel)

Björn Siegel (IGdJ, Hamburg), "To Europe with Pleasure!": Arnold Bernstein's Attempt to Reestablish American-European Shipping Industries

Anne Zetsche (Northumbria University, Newcastle), Eric M. Warburg: A Bridge over the Atlantic

Panel III - Beyond the Atlantic: Migrant Translations

of the Global South

Chair/Comment: Jan Logemann (GHI Washington)

Hanno Plass (Technische Universität Berlin), From South Africa to England and Beyond: Ruth First (1925-1982) and the International Struggle against Apartheid

Jadwiga E. Pieper-Mooney (University of Arizona, Tucson), Chilean Exiles as "Translators": Negotiating Political Obligations and Human Rights in the German Democratic Republic

THE ROLE OF MIGRANTS IN PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATIONS

Panel IV - Facilitating the Flow of Goods: Translations in Business and Industry

Chair/Comment: Simone Lässig (University of Braunschweig)

Jan Logemann (GHI Washington), Translating the Modern World of Goods: Émigré Marketing Experts between Europe and the United States

Corinna Ludwig (GHI Washington / Bielefeld University), Mad as in Madison Avenue? The Encounters of American and German Advertising Professionals in Case of the Volkswagen Beetle Campaign in 1960s West Germany

Panel V - Lost in Translation? Transatlantic Migrations in Popular Culture

Chair/Comment: Corinna Unger (Jacobs University, Bremen)

Miriam Rürup (IGdJ, Hamburg), Imagining Remigration and Return: Translating Experience and Utopia into Film (Der Ruf, 1949 and Long is the Road, 1948)

Joachim Schlör (University of Southampton), "Da wärs halt gut, wenn man Englisch könn't!": Robert Gilbert, Hermann Leopoldi, and the Role of Languages between Exile and Return

Panel VI - Adapting Professional Expertise: Social Work between Europe and America

Chair/Comment: Christiane Reinecke (Forschungsinstitut für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg)

Laura Hobson Faure (University of Paris), Migrants as Experts: The Reform of French Jewish Social Welfare, 1944-1960

Barbara Louis (University of Minnesota), Translators of the Social: Former Émigrés and Their Social Work Efforts in Postwar Europe, 1950-1970

Panel VII – The Language of Space: Émigrés and Urban Transformation Architect-Planners as Transatlantic Mediators
Chair: Dirk Schubert (Hafen City University, Hamburg) Tamara Bjažić Klarin (Croatian Museum of Architecture, Zagreb), Architect Ernest Weissmann: A Common European Immigrant Story
Andreas Joch (GHI Washington / University of Gießen), Translating Planning Practices – Émigré *Concluding Discussion*

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Jan Logemann. Review of , *Migrants as “Translators” : Mediating External Influences on Post World War II Western Europe, 1945-1973*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. February, 2014.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=41189>

Copyright © 2014 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.