

Biography and Society



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Biography
and Society

NEWSLETTER/AUGUST 2020

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENCY

Dear Colleagues,

Many aspects of our lives have changed since we distributed the last newsletter in December 2019. In very differing ways and to a differing extent we are all personally affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. It has also brought new challenges for us in our position as sociologists and researchers. It has changed the ways in which we are able to do research, as well as the formats of teaching.

Clearly, however, the effects are different in different parts of the world. In collaboration with the Board of RC 38 we sent a letter to ISA President Sari Hanafi and Vice-President Geoffrey Pleyers. We stressed that in particular the situation in Brazil, but not only there, creates a need but also offers possibilities for the ISA to contribute more visibly to the critical voices which are being raised in relation to the current situation, in which social inequality and authoritarian politics in a number of countries have become even more explicit. Precarious living conditions are aggravated, and people are put at risk and die due to political decisions and power regimes. What we think is important in the current situation is visible solidarity with marginalized groupings that are particularly affected, such as indigenous people, refugees, children, or people with diseases.

In the letter, we also asked for clarification of the status of the Forum, and advocated holding an online Forum in 2021. We suggested that the Forum in Porto Alegre could be postponed to 2024. The conference clearly cannot take place in Porto Alegre as planned. We think that an online conference would be a public sign of solidarity in respect of environmental (climate) issues, inequality and social matters, and an opportunity to position ourselves, as sociologists, against authoritarian and repressive power regimes. The latest news is that it seems clear that the upcoming Forum will be held online, and that the details will be communicated in good time.

COVID 19 is also a special feature in our newsletter. We are very happy to be able to include a detailed report by Gabriele Rosenthal and her team showing the impact of the pandemic in the very different research settings in which they are involved. We have also included contributions from RC 38 members which we had already distributed via email.

Additionally, despite the current situation there is an encouraging number of project reports and announcements, conference reports, and especially publications by senior and junior RC 38 members, including a new biographical research series.

Thank you for your attention and cooperation and we hope you will enjoy reading this voluminous issue of our Newsletter.

Hermílio Santos, Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Tazuko Kobayashi, Johannes Becker

Membership fees

Please remember to pay your membership fee. To apply for membership or renew ISA and/or RC affiliation, please use the membership form online:

<https://isa.enoah.com/Sign-In>

The membership fees to the RC38 for 4 years are (see ISA regulations):

Regular members U\$ 40

Students and members from countries B and C U\$ 20

If you have any questions concerning the membership, please contact Johannes Becker for advice: johannes.becker@sowi.uni-goettingen.de

The deadline for the next Newsletter is at the end of November 2020.

Please send us:

- A short paper (3-7 pages) on a topic you are currently working on
- A presentation of your current project
- Some reflections on your experiences of teaching biographical approaches and methods
- Reports or some notes about conferences you have attended
- General reports about activities in the field of biographical research in your institution, university, country, continent
- Interesting calls for papers for conferences, workshops, summer schools
- New publications from you, also in your respective native language
- Any other thought or information you would like to share.
- Please send your contributions in Word or rtf formats.

Send your contribution directly to:

Biography-and-Society@gmx.de

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CORONA: SPECIAL FEATURE

Migrants, especially Refugees, in Brazil, the Middle East, Africa and Western Europe in Times of Covid-19¹

*Research team from the Center of Methods in Social Sciences,
University of Göttingen, Germany*

1. General design and findings of our research

At the Center of Methods of the University of Göttingen we had plans to carry out fieldwork in Jordan and Brazil in the spring and summer of 2020, as part of two current research projects funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG): "Dynamic figurations of refugees, migrants, and longtime residents in Jordan since 1946"² and "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany"³. We intended to hold follow-up interviews with refugees and migrants in both countries whom we had met and interviewed during previous fieldwork, and to conduct further group discussions and participant observations. In the light of the empirical findings resulting from four periods of fieldwork in Jordan, and from several months of fieldwork carried out in Brazil in 2019, we this time wanted to include groupings of refugees or migrants that we had not interviewed before.

But what could we do, when not only was it impossible for us to enter Jordan or Brazil, but, more importantly, the people living there, and especially migrants and refugees, are currently facing extremely precarious circumstances? At the sites of our previous fieldwork, we had worked with field assistants who themselves belonged to the groupings we were interested in interviewing. Some of them were people with whom we had already conducted biographical interviews. And we had kept in contact with many of our interviewees via digital media such as WhatsApp, Facebook or Skype, so that we decided to use these existing contacts. The follow-up interviews we conducted with migrants and refugees – including some currently living in western Europe – on their situation in times of Covid-19 made us painfully aware of the effects of the various lockdown measures and the loss of sources of income. This, as well as

¹ We conceptualize flight/refugee migration as a specific type of migration. In contrast to state-centred and legal distinctions between forms of migration (such as "labour migration" and "forced migration"), refugees are thus regarded here as migrants on a very general sociological level. For an overview of the debate on conceptual challenges in the fields of migration research and forced migration/refugee research, see Worm, Arne (2019): *Fluchtmigration aus Syrien. Eine biographietheoretische und figurationssoziologische Studie*. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag. (Engl.: "Refugee Migration. A Biographical and Figurational Study of Life Histories of Syrian Refugees"). <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2019-1228>. The following case studies represent very different courses of migration and current situations in terms of "legality" (from entry and life in a more or less stable and legalized framework to very precarious illegalized situations).

² This project (RO 827/20-1) is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the period April 2017 to February 2021 and is under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal (University of Göttingen, Germany). Team members: Dr. Ahmed Albaba, Dr. Johannes Becker, Dr. Hendrik Hinrichsen and Dolly Abdul Karim, M.A. (2017–2018). See <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/555157.html>.

³ This project (RO 827/21-1) is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and is also under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal. The duration is from February 2019 to January 2022. Team members are: Eva Bahl, Dr. Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu, Lucas Cé Sangalli, M.A., Dr. Arne Worm. The student members of the research team, whose findings are also briefly presented here, are Margherita Cusmano, Tim Sievert and Tom Weiss. See: <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/607273.html>.

certain methodological considerations, led us to offer them an opportunity to conduct online interviews for us; in the case of the project in Jordan, this included interviews with members of their families in their country of origin. This turned out to be an extremely useful research method. Here, we will present some of our first findings and example cases. On the one hand, the data obtained gave us a more differentiated view of the life worlds of the refugees. And on the other hand, it inspired important methodological reflections on conducting online interviews and the significance of the setting in which the interaction takes place. An earlier project⁴ showed clearly that what refugees say depends heavily on the framing of the interview, and especially on the collective belonging of the interviewers (see Rosenthal, Bahl, Worm 2016/2017)⁵. For a number of years now we have kept in contact via social networks with refugees whom we interviewed between 2014 and 2018 in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa. This enables us to follow the long-term process of arrival, processes of re-migration or continuing migration. These interviews are frequently conducted by other members of our team, or field assistants who come from the same ethnic grouping as the interviewee, or have the same mother tongue (especially in the case of Arabic). This provides us with important data that helps us to analyse how and why different interviewers provoke differences in the way migrants present themselves, and how different discursive rules apply depending on who one is talking to.

Our experience with online interviews has shown us their advantages and disadvantages compared to face-to-face interviews. We have learned that digital forms of communication have certain disadvantages when making initial contact with someone, and especially when conducting a biographical interview, because physical co-presence helps to establish trust and to grasp meanings between the lines, emotions, which are usually expressed through body language. But in our experience digital follow-up interviews are a good way of maintaining contact. And the interviewees concerned tell us that they appreciate being able to stay in contact with us in this way.

In general, we can say that the online interviews conducted so far have provided us with data that is extremely valuable for our research. The advantages of this method can be summed up as follows:

1. The inclusion, or better participation, of our field assistants in the gathering of empirical data means we can continue discussing the research results, as well as their own experiences in the field, with them.
2. Our field assistants have carried out further interviews for us with people in their social environment, including members of their own family of origin, and
3. they have provided us with data concerning the situation during the current pandemic.
4. This helps to give a clear picture not only of differences in the particular situations of the refugees or migrants interviewed, but also of how they are affected

⁴ The comparative project "The Social Construction of Border Zones: A comparison of two geopolitical cases" (RO 827/19-1; see <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/477891.html> [accessed: 7 July 2020]) was led by Gabriele Rosenthal and funded by the German Research Foundation. For this project, Eva Bahl, Gabriele Rosenthal and Arne Worm did field research at the Moroccan-Spanish border, and Prof. Dr. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev and Dr. Nir Gazit at the border between Israel and Egypt.

⁵ Rosenthal, Gabriele / Bahl, Eva / Worm Arne (2017): Illegalized migration courses from the perspective of biographical research and figurational sociology: the land border between Spain and Morocco. In: Rosenthal/Bogner (eds.): *Biographies in the Global South*. Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 185-208. In German: Rosenthal, Gabriele / Bahl, Eva/ Worm, Arne (2016) *Illegalisierte Migrationsverläufe aus biografietheoretischer und figurationssoziologischer Perspektive: die Landgrenze zwischen Spanien und Marokko*. In: *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 17 (3), Art. 10. Free download: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2686/4012>.

by the measures taken by the government in the country where they are living (e.g. loss of income, reduced salary as in Jordan, interruption of language and integration courses as in Germany).

5. In the case of individuals with whom we have previously conducted a biographical interview with a subsequent case reconstruction, it is additionally possible to show the biographical genesis of their patterns of interpretation and action with regard to the current Covid-19 crisis.
6. We gain insights into how people react to Covid-19, and how these reactions are influenced by their collective history and changing discourses in respect of epidemics and infectious diseases in their home region or country. In general, we get a good picture of the public discourses and regulations issued by the authorities in each country, and whether these are accepted or rejected. The most striking case here is Jordan, where the interviews reflect a general acceptance of the measures taken by the government.
7. We can see whether, and to what extent, past experiences of epidemics, and of the state healthcare system in general, have been passed on in families and local communities to the following generations, and especially whether they play a role in the current situation.
8. Our interviews also show to what extent migrant networks, NGOs or religious institutions have gained importance, or lost it, in the current situation. We can discuss this here only very briefly. But in general we can say that support is sometimes only offered in return for promises of solidarity, and can result in greater social control.
9. Not least, this design enables us to give financial support to our field assistants, as well as the interviewees, who received an expense allowance from us for their participation in the interviews.

Below, we present the *initial findings* along these dimensions resulting from our research in Jordan and the Middle East, Brazil and western Europe. In the coming months we will conduct further interviews: in particular we want to counteract the tendency to focus on the perspective of male migrants/refugees in our project samples. A certain male-centredness or a failure to represent the perspectives of people of different genders* has often been addressed in the context of refugee research⁶ – a tendency which, as we have self-critically noted, is also manifested in this report. However, we were able to interview some women in both projects despite considerable difficulties in accessing the field, and we also worked with women as field assistants.

We will continue to work with field assistants and train them, for example, in the necessary interview techniques. And we will try to motivate all of them to interview members of their family in their country of origin. Our aim is to make a contrastive comparison of the different case studies, which in this report are simply assembled like a mosaic. With regard to our method, it is important to note that after receiving audio recordings of the interviews conducted by our field assistants, we then interview them and ask them to tell us briefly about their own experiences with making these recordings. We organize transcription and translation of the audio recordings so that all our team members can understand them. We currently have recordings in eight languages.

On behalf of the whole team I would like to express our gratitude to all our interviewees, who for reasons of data protection we refer to here only with masked first names

⁶ See Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena (2014): Gender and Forced Migration. In: E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long and N. Sigona (eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 395-408.

(and in some cases masked place names), as well as to those who supported us as field assistants and themselves conducted follow-up interviews. Without all of you, this report would not have been possible!

Gabriele Rosenthal
Göttingen, Germany, July 2020

2. Interviews with refugees in the Middle East

When the first Covid-19 case was announced on 2nd March 2020, the reaction of the Jordanian government was swift and restrictive. King Abdullah II declared a state of emergency under the terms of the “National Defence Law” on 17th March 2020. The disease was thus placed in the same category as “war, disturbances, armed internal strife, public disasters”, which shows how seriously it was taken from the beginning.⁷ The aim was to make Jordan free of “internal” cases of Covid-19. That this policy (and the political discourse in Jordan in general) was couched in terms of “national defence” is also shown by the fact that armed soldiers (and armoured vehicles) were deployed to enforce the subsequent lockdown in urban areas. Anyone who violated the lockdown was threatened with immediate arrest and imprisonment. On 28th June 2020, the Jordanian health minister, Saad Jaber, declared that the coronavirus had “dried up and died” within the country.⁸ However, 14 new cases of Covid-19 were announced on 5th July 2020. On that date, a total of 1,164 cases had been registered since the beginning of the crisis.⁹ At the time of writing, the state of emergency has not yet been lifted.

Jordan has been hard hit by the pandemic. Its economy was weak before the outbreak, and through the immediate and complete closing of the borders it lost its income from tourism, one of the most important sectors. And for the very high number of poor families – whose members are unemployed or who live in urban areas with no land they can cultivate – the period of the lockdown was extremely challenging, despite increased government relief. Nevertheless, most people supported the government's strict policy. Indeed, during this period up to 90% of the people approved the government's actions, while only 40% did so before the outbreak.¹⁰

Here we will discuss interviews we conducted in Jordan during the Covid-19 pandemic. Ahmed Albaba (a German citizen of Palestinian origin) and local field assistants from Amman conducted a total of ten interviews in April and May. Our main focus will be on two interviews with individuals whom we will call Nadeem and Masoud. They both live in Amman, Nadeem since the 1990s, and Masoud since 2016. Nadeem came as a Palestinian refugee from Kuwait in 1990/91, and has Jordanian citizenship. Masoud is a refugee from Iraq who has lived in Amman since 2016 without a residence or work permit.¹¹ Both interviews were conducted in Arabic by Ah-

⁷ UNDP Jordan (2020): Jordan National Defence Law and COVID-19. Online: <https://tinyurl.com/y9v2oy49>

⁸ Al-Rai, 28.6.2020, online: <https://tinyurl.com/y99y44d8>

⁹ Roya News, 5.7.2020, online: <https://royanews.tv/news/218315>

¹⁰ UNDP Jordan (2020): Jordan National Defence Law and COVID-19. Online: <https://tinyurl.com/y9v2oy49>

¹¹ For an analysis of another family from Iraq in such a precarious legal situation, see Becker, J./ Hinrichsen, H. (in print): Milieuspezifische Fluchtmigrationsverläufe und die Etablierung in neuen räumlichen Kontexten: Das Beispiel irakischer Flüchtlinge in Amman. Will be published in: Bahl, E./ Becker, J. (Hrsg.). Global processes of flight and migration: The explanatory power of case studies. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press.

med Albaba via Skype. We will discuss in particular the discursive “rationalization” and the emphatic “modernity” displayed by the interviewees when talking to us.

The interview with **Nadeem**¹² shows how his perceptions of the pandemic and of the measures taken by the government changed, which corresponds to what we were told by other interviewees. Nadeem lives in a densely populated district of Amman with a high number of Palestinians. Nadeem, who is in his early fifties, was born in Kuwait. He migrated to Amman together with his parents and siblings in 1990, following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Interestingly, Nadeem compares the Covid-19 crisis with the crisis faced by his family in the 1990s. He says that in both situations their lives took a 180 degree turn, and both times the family had to re-organize or re-establish itself. In the first situation this was because of the unplanned and abrupt move to a new country, and in the second situation it was because of the financial crisis which threatened to plunge the entire extended family into serious difficulties.

Two of his five brothers, who all live in Jordan, have been hit the hardest by the Covid-19 crisis, because they have no regular employment and have had no work since the lockdown began in March 2020. Nadeem says that although his two brothers applied several times for government relief, they have received nothing, or only from their relatives. By contrast, Nadeem is in a fairly secure financial position, because he is employed in one of the Jordanian ministries, and he owns a small café-shop. However, his income no longer covers his expenditure, so that in the lockdown period Nadeem had to set new priorities. The fact that his salary was reduced by more than 50 JOD in the context of measures taken by the government added to Nadeem's dissatisfaction and insecurity. On 16th April, Prime Minister Omar ar-Razzaz declared that under Defence Order No. 6 issued on 8th April 2020 the monthly wages of government officials could be reduced by up to 30% in May and June 2020.¹³

Nadeem's reactions to the Covid-19 crisis can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, Nadeem thought there was no real danger of being infected with the coronavirus, not least because only one case had been identified in Jordan. He says that people around him thought the risk was exaggerated, and some of them even believed that the whole thing was a perfidious conspiracy and should not be taken seriously. With reference to this phase, he says:

“In the beginning I believed what people in the street were saying. They said it's not dangerous. It's just a kind of flu. There was a coronavirus a few years ago and it wasn't so bad. Just a virus like any other virus. But this coronavirus is different from the old one. And its genetic strain is unknown.”

To explain why he changed his mind, Nadeem (like Masoud and other people we interviewed in Jordan) says that after a wedding in the city of Irbid on 20th March 2020, around 85 attendees had developed Covid-19.¹⁴ This event, which became known as “the Irbid wedding”, led to a heated debate in the media.¹⁵ Among other things, reference was made to a study which apparently blamed this wedding for the spread of the coronavirus in Jordan.¹⁶ The publication of the number of infections

¹² The interview took place on 15.5.2020 via Skype. Johannes Becker had already conducted a biographical-narrative interview with Nadeem in January 2019.

¹³ Al-Ghad, 31.5.2020, online: <https://tinyurl.com/ycdly3yt>

¹⁴ Yusef, Dawood et al. (2020): Large Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease among Wedding Attendees, Jordan. In: Emerging Infectious Diseases 26(9). Online: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/9/20-1469_article.

¹⁵ BBC Arabic, 22.3.2020, online: <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/trending-51997909>

¹⁶ Yusef, Dawood et al. (2020): Large Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease among Wedding Attendees, Jordan. In: Emerging Infectious Diseases 26(9). Online: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/9/20-1469_article.

was a turning point for Nadeem; it made him see that the coronavirus was a risk to be taken seriously. This second phase can thus be characterized by his “rational reaction” and his new insight regarding the risk of becoming infected with the coronavirus. An important role was played here by institutionalized awareness campaigns and media reports – including social media. The third phase consists of developing everyday strategies for coping with the crisis. Nadeem tried to get used to new habits, such as wearing a mask, which was a new experience for him. He also had to get used to reducing his social contacts and restricting his mobility. In the interview we conducted with him on 15th May 2020, he said that he now disagrees with people who play down the coronavirus crisis. To illustrate this, he describes a situation that makes his position clear.

“But after a while we had no more bread and I had to go out to buy bread and other things we needed. Directly after the morning prayer, I went to the baker’s and waited in a queue for three hours, from 6 o’clock to 10 o’clock (i.e. four hours), before I was served. Everyone was moving about on foot. The baker’s shop is two kilometres away from where I live. I had to go out shopping several times, because I had to go on foot and I couldn’t carry everything at once. I can’t send my children because they are too small and anyway they are the most vulnerable group. A bit later we were allowed to use the car. That was a help. People ignored the rule that we should keep 1.5 metres apart from each other. They said: the coronavirus doesn’t exist, it’s all a conspiracy. There are lines marked on the ground to show where we should stand when queuing. I kept the right distance from the person in front of me in the queue but the person behind me came closer and closer. I said to him: You’re not worried about yourself, but I’m worried about myself and about my family, and I don’t want to infect them.” (Nadeem, May 2020)

Like many segments of the Palestinian population in Jordan, Nadeem is basically distrustful of, or opposed to, the Jordanian monarchy or the Jordanian government. However, the government’s rigid strategy in this crisis has led him to take a positive view of it; thus, the government has succeeded, at least in the short term, in gaining the support of various groupings within the population. Despite his general critique of the government, and despite the financial problems that have recently affected his family, Nadeem believes that the measures to contain the pandemic taken by the government are right and necessary: “Although I have plenty of criticisms against the government, I can testify that it acted wisely in respect of the coronavirus.” Thus, in the interview situation his arguments are insightful and “rational”; this is characteristic not only of the interview with Nadeem, but also of the other interviews we conducted. Almost all our interviewees mentioned similar exchanges with people within their own milieu who tended to play down the severity of the crisis. The interviewees distanced themselves from those who believed that the Covid-19 crisis was a conspiracy and that it posed no real threat. They said they complied with the rules set by the government or by health institutions, even in situations where there was no one to enforce this.

This “rational” presentation could be due to the context of the interview. All the interviewees were told beforehand that the interviews were being conducted for the Center of Methods at the University of Göttingen. Perhaps they ascribed certain qualities to the German interviewers – such as “rational thinking” – and therefore tended to describe or represent themselves, their family, and even their country, as rational. They also saw themselves as representatives of their community or their country. As mentioned above, the interviews were conducted partly by Ahmed Albaba from Germany and partly by our field assistants in Amman. The follow-up interviews with Nadeem and Masoud were organized for Ahmed Albaba by our field as-

sistant Sameera Qatoooni (a Palestinian woman whose family fled to Jordan in 1948). Ahmed Albaba's Palestinian origins were well known to Sameera. Nevertheless, in the interview situation with Nadeem, Ahmed Albaba, who has lived in Germany for many years, was above all regarded as a member of a German university or German research team.

By contrast, in the interview with **Masoud**¹⁷ (who was born in 1990), it seems that the interviewer's Palestinian origins, or, more exactly, the Arab and Muslim belonging ascribed to him, could be the reason for the wariness and caution displayed by Masoud when he was asked if he would agree to an interview, and in the interview itself. His situation in Jordan is legally and financially precarious: he does not have refugee status but lives in Amman with an expired visa and no work permit. During our fieldwork in 2018, Johannes Becker conducted a biographical-narrative interview with Masoud, who subsequently worked for us as a field assistant. Despite this earlier cooperation, he clearly had doubts when asked if he would agree to being interviewed by Ahmed Albaba. He wanted to know the purpose of the interview, exactly what the team would do with the information collected, whether it would be possible to identify the interviewees if it was published, and whether the German government or the German secret service would have access to it. Masoud explained that he wanted to leave Jordan and travel to somewhere like Germany, and he was afraid this might not be possible if things that he said should get into the wrong hands. Since he had formerly cooperated with us on a basis of trust, we conclude that his doubts were related specifically to Ahmed Albaba. Although we assured him that we would make it impossible to identify him or his family, he refused to allow the interview to be recorded on tape. The following quotations from the interview are therefore based on the notes made by Ahmed Albaba. Our hypothesis is that while Masoud and the interviewer had plenty in common in cultural and religious terms, which made communication easier – they are both Muslims and they talked to each other in Arabic – this also made Masoud more cautious. This was probably due to his biographical experiences, for instance with armed Arab-Muslim groupings in Iraq, or with Palestinians in Amman.

Masoud, who comes from a well-established family in Mosul, is the son of an Arab father and a Kurdish mother. In the context of the advance of the so-called Islamic State in 2012, he had fled to Iraqi Kurdistan together with his family, after his father had several times been threatened or blackmailed. In 2016 the family migrated to Jordan. After one year, his family returned to relatives in Iraqi Kurdistan, while he remained in Jordan. Besides two interviews with Masoud himself, there are two interviews that Masoud conducted from Amman with his parents and his sister in Iraq during the pandemic.

The approach to the pandemic revealed in the interviews with Masoud and members of his family is characterized strongly by a family focus on hygiene and a state discourse of modernity. His precarious legal (and financial) status in Jordan, and the fact that he was living alone in the city, meant that even before the pandemic Masoud behaved cautiously, or even warily, in public spaces. For several years now Masoud has seen no future for himself in Jordan, but he has not found any opportunity to migrate to another country – if possible, to Germany. He puts it this way: "Your future is uncertain and all the time you think about emigrating. Life is impossible here in this country... I want a different future."

In the context of the pandemic, this difficult situation and his perception that he is stuck in Jordan, is reinforced by his fear of the consequences of an infection. Like

¹⁷ The interview took place on 7.4.2020 via Skype.

Nadeem, he compares the experience of the pandemic with collective experiences of war and violent conflicts:

“We saw many things in Iraq in 2003, murder, unrest, fighting on the streets, and we experienced many difficult situations. The situation with the coronavirus is just as difficult as the situation in Iraq in 2003.”

Masoud's fears have led to a greater avoidance of public spaces, increased media consumption, and complaints about people who do not keep to the rules. It is very clear that Masoud's “daily life in the pandemic” is influenced by the family dialogue on hygiene. What he says in this respect is very similar to what his family members say. Hygiene was important for Masoud even before the pandemic, and now even more so. He describes how every time he comes back home he washes himself thoroughly and changes his clothes. His mother, in the interview with her, describes similar behaviour, and puts this down to the “modern” orientation of her Iraqi family. This is what the mother says in the interview conducted by her son Masoud:¹⁸

“...cleanliness and prevention are most important. We were taught this when we were young. I wash my hands, and if I go to the hospital and come back from there, I wash my hands and change my clothes. I never sit at home in clothes I have worn outside. We are a self-confident people. You don't have to be *muthaqaf* [educated/intellectual], but if you are *wā'y* [self-confident] and if you have experience, you will be able to protect yourself. We learned this from our parents.”

This family dialogue is reflected in Masoud's remarks, mixed with disdain for people who do not observe the basic rules of hygiene:

“My mother taught us the importance of cleanliness when we were children. But now she pays even more attention to it. She calls me and asks whether I have washed the dishes, cleaned, tidied up, or not. She told me I should stay at home and not hang out with my friends. Hygiene is nice. I have clothes that I only wear at home. When I come from outside, I change my clothes, wash my hands and feet. I've bought a mask, gloves and disinfectant. I disinfect everything and wash my food thoroughly. I try not to go out. But in the poor districts people don't follow the rules properly. They stand too close to each other when queuing at the baker's or in the supermarket. People eat, drink and smoke out of doors, as usual. They are more afraid of food shortages than of the virus. They don't take the virus seriously. They don't go to the hospital when they develop symptoms. The situation here is really hard. People meet each other as usual and talk and hang around together.”

The negative view of others in his neighbourhood expressed by Masoud in this quotation is related in the first place to their failure to observe the hygiene rules. But beyond this, it also suggests that Masoud sees a difference between himself and the other people in the “poor district” of Amman where he now lives, because their status does not correspond to the former status of his family in Mosul. While this distinction has existed all the time that Masoud has lived alone in Jordan, it has become clearer, or been reinforced, by the pandemic.

These two cases of refugees known to us from our field research in Jordan show that the way people experience the pandemic is closely bound up with past experiences of crises. Masoud and Nadeem both refer to earlier crises in their lives (experiences of war and flight) when describing their present situation. At the same time they have both found strategies for coping with this situation that are associated respectively

¹⁸ The interview took place on 15.4.2020 via Skype.

with trust in the Jordanian government and with a family dialogue on hygiene. This shows clearly how analysing people's biographies can help to understand their reactions to the pandemic.

Ahmed Albaba & Johannes Becker
Würzburg / Berlin, Germany, July 2020

3. Interviews with refugees in Brazil

In Brazil, the polarization of the political situation has intensified since the coronavirus outbreak. Right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro has trivialized the virus as a “gripezinha” (a little flu) and refused to take decisive measures to curtail the spread of Covid-19. While the number of deaths due to Covid-19 in Brazil has risen to become the second highest in the world (after the USA) as of July 2020, the political discourse of Bolsonaro, his devotees, and many other Brazilian politicians, is the primacy of the economy. Consequently, there has never been a country-wide lockdown and many stores have re-opened in spite of the rising number of infections. The groupings in society that are affected the most – directly by suffering from the disease and indirectly because of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic – are the ones that were marginalized and vulnerable before the outbreak: for example, indigenous people, Afro-Brazilians, people who live in the over-populated communities (“favelas”¹⁹), and migrants.

Furthermore, people who rely on the informal labor market are especially affected. More than 40% of Brazilians work in the informal sector, i.e., with no access to social protection in case of unemployment.²⁰ The initial prohibition of commercial activities in the streets during the coronavirus outbreak in Rio de Janeiro (approximately March 24–June 27), São Paulo (approximately March 20–June 10), Salvador (since March 21), and Southern Brazil (approximately March 20–May 20)²¹ exposed the vulnerability of this part of the Brazilian population, among them many migrants from Senegal and Syria who relied on the money from their jobs to pay for rent, energy, and food, for example, but also to send remittances to their families in their countries of origin. Especially migrants from Haiti and Senegal used to send money monthly to their relatives. In face of the catastrophic management of the coronavirus outbreak in Brazil by the federal government, and the loss of trust in the capacity of the Brazilian government to handle an economic crisis, the currency (Brazilian real) has become strongly devalued in comparison to the US dollar.²²

Many of our interviewees (n=21) in 2019, who were from West Africa (mainly Senegal), South America, Syria, and Haiti, worked as street vendors. While Syrians mostly sold “Arabic” street food, the Senegalese mostly sold technological products (such as loudspeakers or smartphone accessories), and/or sunglasses. Most of our Senegalese and Haitian interviewees shared apartments with others due to the high living costs and rents in Brazil; some lived in more marginalized communities in Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁹ In Brazil, the informal and marginalized settlements, which are often located in the urban periphery and whose population has few economic resources, are called *comunidade* or (pejoratively) *favela*. However, it should be pointed out that these settlements in Brazilian cities also have streets, houses with solid building fabric and other – albeit precarious – infrastructure.

²⁰ <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/empreendedorsocial/2020/06/a-vulnerabilidade-dos-informais-um-desafio-anterior-a-covid-19.shtml>

²¹ See Municipal Decrees (Decreto) 47.282, 47.488 (Rio de Janeiro); 59.298, 59.473 (São Paulo); 32.272, 32.326 (Salvador); 20.506, 20.583 (Porto Alegre).

²² As of July 2020, 1.00 US dollar equals around 5.30 Brazilian reais.

The legal situation differs for different groupings and individuals.²³ While people from Syria have had access to a humanitarian visa since 2013,²⁴ this is mostly not granted to people from West African countries. For Senegalese citizens who had applied for refugee status in Brazil,²⁵ the Brazilian government issued an ordinance²⁶ in December 2019 which gave them the right to apply for residence and thereby regularize their status. In general, government interventions in the sense of controls, but also of support services for refugees or migrants, are much less pronounced in Brazil compared, for instance, to Germany. The effects of a new immigration law in Brazil (2017), which is intended to give migrants and refugees legal equality with Brazilian citizens, are still unclear. There are currently only a few state-organized initiatives and programs for targeted welfare support. Religious institutions are most likely to provide support for migrants. The living conditions of migrants and refugees thus depend to a very small extent on the state, and to a correspondingly greater extent on their own positioning in the informal sector.

Since the coronavirus outbreak we have conducted online follow-up interviews with nine people we interviewed in Brazil in 2019. Further interviews are in progress. The coronavirus outbreak and the restrictions associated with it have directly affected their activities and their income. Many have not been able to continue selling their merchandise and being active in the informal economy. Those working in restaurants or on construction sites have also lost their jobs. They have all lost their sources of income. Since then, they have been living on their savings (if they have been in Brazil long enough to have any), or relying on food donated for those in need and governmental emergency relief amounting to R\$ 600 (around 100 €/110 US \$) per month,²⁷ access to which has proved difficult for many migrants.

Besides these online follow-up interviews, and in the face of restrictions to our fieldwork due to closure of the borders for foreigners,²⁸ we asked some of our interviewees to conduct interviews with people who live with them in the same apartment or building and who are in similar situations. At the time of writing, two of our interviewees (Julius from Sierra Leone and Bassam from Senegal) have conducted such interviews for our project. Both found themselves in precarious living and work situations in the city of Rio de Janeiro. They will keep working for us, and we also hope that online interviews with the interviewees' families in their home countries will be possible. However, there are hindering factors, especially (1) the available technological infrastructure, and (2) the role of our interviewees in their families. Thus, the success or failure of interviews with family members at home will help to give us insights into these two components, which are of great significance for them and their families.

Re 1.: For example, our interviewee and field assistant Julius from Sierra Leone told us that he has problems talking to his father and his son and the son's mother, because

²³ See: Cé Sangalli, Lucas/Dos Santos Gonçalves, Maria do Carmo (forthcoming): Migrants and Refugees from Ghana and Haiti in Southern Brazil. Familial Constellations and Processes of Escape. In: Bahl, Eva/Becker, Johannes (eds.): Global Processes of Flight and Migration. The Explanatory Power of Case Studies / Globale Flucht- und Migrationsprozesse. Die Erklärungskraft von Fallstudien. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press. Online: <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2020-1315> <15.07.2020>.

²⁴ <https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2013/09/24/sirios-terao-visto-humanitario-para-entrar-no-brasil/>

²⁵ According to the news site Globo, in 17 years only 15 asylum applications (out of a total of 8,000) by Senegalese migrants have been approved by the Brazilian state: <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2019/12/06/senegaleses-que-pediram-refugio-no-brasil-terao-novo-procedimento-para-obter-autorizacao-de-residencia.ghtml>

²⁶ www.in.gov.br/en/web/dou/-/portaria-interministerial-n-10-de-5-de-dezembro-de-2019-231852423

²⁷ "The R\$ 600.00 benefit is payable for three months, for up to two people in the same family. For families where the woman is solely responsible for all household expenses, the monthly amount payable is R\$ 1,200.00." Source: Caixa Econômica Federal, Brasil 2020 (<https://auxilio.caixa.gov.br/#/inicio>).

²⁸ <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2020/07/01/coronavirus-governo-prorroga-ate-o-fim-de-julho-a-restricao-da-entrada-de-estrangeiros-no-brasil.ghtml>

they do not have internet or internet-compatible phones, and he has to buy credit to call them. This is definitely a hindering factor with regard to interviewing them – but also quite generally with regard to keeping in contact with his family (and it is psychologically very burdening for him). By contrast, Bassam is in direct contact with his mother and his wife, who live in Pikine, Senegal. This is an indication of a more established situation in the region of origin in contrast to Julius' family.

Re 2.: Most of our interviewees from Senegal and Sierra Leone have an important role as breadwinners in their families. They feel a huge responsibility to send money to their families on a regular basis and present this as their main reason for living and working in Brazil. The phrase "I haven't sent money for two months" was recurrent in our interviews, and points to the burden that is felt when one has to spend money without being able to earn any. This might be another hindering factor with regard to interviewing family members.

Below, we quote from an interview that Julius conducted with a Senegalese man who arrived in Brazil shortly before the pandemic broke out (in January 2020). He talks about his situation and the situation of his community:

"We can barely pay for the room. We eat a little bit of everything, just to feed ourselves (*juste pour nourrir*). Sometimes the neighbors in our (4-story) building give us something. They see that everybody cooks except us. Sometimes they give us something. We are very worried that we will be evicted if we don't pay the rent. We are very tired." (Moussa from Senegal, interviewed by Julius from Sierra Leone in July 2020. The interview was conducted in French and translated by Eva Bahl).

Whole families in the home countries of migrants, which normally are supported by them, have been put in a very precarious situation by the present situation in Brazil. This interviewee says:

"I told you, I left Senegal to have a better life. That's where the family is. You are leaving all of them and there is great hope that you can help them a little bit. But if you can't even help yourself, how will you help the others? We haven't been going out for three months and last week we started trying to go back out and sell something. But the situation hasn't changed much. But we are tired of just sitting in the room and not having money to pay the rent or buy something to eat. That's why we started going out. But nothing has changed much. We're still in the same situation." (Moussa from Senegal, interviewed by Julius from Sierra Leone in July 2020. The interview was conducted in French and translated by Eva Bahl).

Healthcare has become extremely precarious for migrants, as state hospitals (to which they have access) are overburdened with Covid-19 patients. Migrants who have health problems do not dare to go there because of the risk of infection. Generally, the follow-up interviews are focused on the current, crisis-ridden situation of our interviewees – which, as we show, is not necessarily related only to the Covid-19 outbreak, but also to "natural" disasters (in reality man-made), especially in Southern Brazil. This made it difficult for our interviewees to embark on the process of storytelling about their life before their flight, or their family constellations, and to have a stable horizon for thinking about the future – a phenomenon Arne Worm has described as a "condensed present perspective".²⁹ This means that a person's current situation

²⁹ Worm, Arne (2017) Civil War and the Figurations of Illegalized Migration. Biographies of Syrian migrants to the European Union. In: Gabriele Rosenthal und Artur Bogner (eds.), *Biographies in the Global South*. Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus.; Worm, Arne (2019) *Fluchtmigration. Eine biographietheoretische und figurationssoziologische Studie zu lebensgeschichtlichen Verläufen von Geflüchteten aus Syrien*. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press. Online: <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2019-1228> <15.07.2020>.

is insecure and changing to such a great extent that looking back to the past or into the future – as well as making biographical plans – is blocked (ibid.).

Below, we present some cases in more detail.

Mohamed, a 27-year-old Syrian Alawite from the region of Tartus, left Syria in the context of the Syrian conflict and mandatory army conscription. When Lucas Cé Sangalli, a Brazilian researcher working at a German university, interviewed him in Portuguese in October 2019, he was running a small store in a market in downtown Rio de Janeiro. Alongside other reasons (high rental costs, low sale, no support by his family), the coronavirus outbreak and restrictions enforced in the market led him to close his store. For a while, he considered going back to the streets to work with an “Arab” food cart again – something he had proudly said he would not do anymore after he had opened his own store. As of June 2020³⁰, he had managed to find a job as an employee in the store of a more established Lebanese migrant in the context of the re-opening of commercial activities in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Many of the Senegalese street vendors we have been in touch with seem to feel more threatened by the economic situation than by the risk of infection itself. In the interviews conducted at the end of June/beginning of July 2020, they expressed the hope that – as the strict lockdown in Rio de Janeiro and other cities was coming to an end³¹ – they might also be able to go back to their economic activities. Rising death tolls and exponentially rising infection rates did not play a role in their reasoning. As of July 2020, some had already gone back to selling in Copacabana, when the beach re-opened. This time, though, with far less tourists than before.

Bassam, who is now our field assistant, is a 24-year-old Senegalese from Pikine. He left his young son and his wife in Senegal to earn money in Rio de Janeiro to build a house for his family in Senegal, as he explained in the interview conducted with him in October 2019 by Lucas Cé Sangalli and Gabriele Rosenthal³². When Lucas Cé Sangalli re-interviewed him in July 2020, Bassam said he had planned to go back to Senegal to see his family right after the carnival, a period when he expected to make more money. Due to flight restrictions and the unstable situation created by the coronavirus outbreak, he postponed his plans. From day to day, he was becoming more and more worried about his family in Senegal:

“the Corona is very difficult in Senegal is very=very=very difficult they have ... a lot of fear well they don't work. It's really hard. But well it's going to end the good Lord will help. We prefer to stay calm, ah then we will work but it is really difficult ... Ebola was not a lot in Senegal, we didn't have it a lot – but it was the first time I see a disease like that. The first time. Honestly. Really.” (Bassam, July 2020. Translation from French to English by Lucas Cé Sangalli).

Amadou and **Bayo**, two Senegalese men in their thirties were hit hard by the pandemic. Maria do Carmo Santos Gonçalves, a Brazilian specialist in migration studies, who knew them from her work at a Migrant Reception Center in Southern Brazil, Lucas Cé Sangalli and Eva Bahl, a German researcher, had interviewed and met them on several occasions in Rio de Janeiro in October/November 2019. The interviews were conducted in French and Portuguese, sometimes with translation from Wolof to French. They have both been in Brazil since 2013/2014, and for several years now

³⁰ The follow-up interview took place via WhatsApp audio messages in Portuguese, conducted by Lucas Cé Sangalli.

³¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/20200611-sao-paulo-re-opens-after-lockdown-despite-brazil-s-surging-covid-19-death-toll>

³² The interview was conducted partly in Portuguese, but mainly in French, a language Bassam learned at school in Senegal. His mother tongue is Wolof.

have shared an apartment with two other Senegalese men. All of them used to work as street vendors at the beach in Copacabana and Ipanema. They frequently sent money to their families who depended on these remittances. In a follow-up interview conducted by Eva Bahl in July 2020³³, they told us that they had been staying in their small apartment for more than two months. What seemed to worry them the most was that they were spending the savings they had planned to use to travel to Senegal to visit their families, and that they had not been able to send any money to their families.

Like the group of young Senegalese men we interviewed in Rio de Janeiro, **Alioune**, a 27-year-old Senegalese, lost his customers at the beach in Praia da Barra and Farol da Barra in Salvador da Bahia, Northeastern Brazil. For this reason, he moved back to Southern Brazil around May 2020. In July 2020, when Lucas Cé Sangalli conducted a follow-up interview with him in Portuguese (his mother tongue is Wolof and he does not speak French), he was living in a rural area of Paraná. He had found a job as a construction worker and mentioned more work opportunities in the region, since many companies (such as slaughterhouses) had not stopped their activities during the coronavirus outbreak. Due to the public discourse of “the economy cannot wait”, many of these companies became the center of outbreaks of coronavirus infections in the region.³⁴ In the Southern region of Brazil, people who worked in slaughterhouses constituted 25% of all people infected by the coronavirus as of June 2020.³⁵ These workers (and their families) were in a more vulnerable situation during the coronavirus outbreak than others.

The case of **Fary**, a 40-year-old man from Dakar, Senegal, his wife from the Dominican Republic, and their two children born in Brazil, illustrates well how the effects of the pandemic intersect with other factors – for example the difficulties associated with precarious living conditions during the winter in Southern Brazil. In July 2020, a period when there are heavy rains in the region, Lucas Cé Sangalli conducted a follow-up interview with him, in which Fary apologized for talking in Portuguese, saying he had forgotten most of his French; he presented Wolof as his mother tongue. Just when Fary would have been allowed to resume his activities as a street vendor after the lockdown, the intense rains made it impossible. The floods have directly affected marginalized neighborhoods close to the river, an area where many migrants from Haiti and the Dominican Republic live with their families.

On top of this, the devaluation of the Brazilian currency directly impacted his remittances to his family in Senegal:

“It's very cold here. That's why coronavirus is still present. It's difficult for everyone now. Everything is hard. You know, we foreigners work here and send the money to other countries. Here, the dollar is too expensive. If we transfer to Senegal, it costs six reais to do the transfer. That's why it's hard for us here. Coronavirus is still here. And there's the rain. Since Sunday, it's raining here. There are many houses under water [...]. It's also difficult in Senegal. Our family there depends on us” (Fary, July 2020. Translation from Portuguese to English by Lucas Cé Sangalli).

Julius, a 40-year-old man from Sierra Leone who was interviewed by Maria do Carmo Santos Gonçalves and Eva Bahl in October 2019, is probably the interviewee in the most vulnerable situation at the moment. After having migrated back and forth be-

³³ The first interview was only with Bayo (in Portuguese), the second interview was with both of them together (Portuguese and French), as they live together and are friends.

³⁴ <https://revistagloborural.globo.com/Noticias/Economia/noticia/2020/03/cooperativas-do-agro-empregam-cada-vez-mais-imigrantes-no-parana.html>

³⁵ <https://www.correiodopovo.com.br/not%C3%ADcias/geral/cerca-de-25-dos-infectados-pela-covid-no-rs-trabalham-em-frigor%C3%ADficos-revela-mpt-1.440356>

tween Sierra Leone and Nigeria most of his life (fleeing the civil war and an Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, and Boko Haram in Nigeria), he decided to migrate to Trinidad in December 2018. His entry to the country was rejected and while being deported back, he was able to apply for asylum in Brazil. There, without networks, he lived in very precarious situations and mostly depended on church and welfare organizations. Shortly before the coronavirus outbreak, his situation had started to improve, and he was working at a restaurant as a cook. With the beginning of the pandemic he lost his job and the support of his church community, which had consisted mostly of expats who left the country when the number of infections started to rise. Now, he lives on food donations from welfare organizations and is fearing homelessness because he has not paid his rent for two months. The situation is worsened by his health condition. He needs to undergo surgery for a hernia that is causing him a lot of pain, but many public hospitals are not accepting patients who are not infected with Covid-19. In one of two follow-up interviews that Eva Bahl conducted with him during the coronavirus outbreak, he said that he had experienced Ebola in Sierra Leone.

"It's almost the same. Everything closed down. A lot of people I know died. We can't travel [...] No movements on the streets. But I'm working and I have money to eat. And I'm in my country. Here it's not my country, I don't have family, I don't have money, I don't even have my own house, it's a rented house." (Julius, April 2020. The interview was conducted in English.)

He said that he was very afraid of catching "the disease" because in Brazil, he fears, "no one will care about me."

As we have tried to show in this short report, all our interviewees are in very difficult situations because of (or worsened by) the pandemic. The consequences are multi-layered. Those who are better off (for example some of the Senegalese vendors who have been in Brazil for several years and have been able to save money) are worried because they are not able to visit their families³⁶ or send money to them. Others fear homelessness and hunger because they cannot pay their rent and cannot afford to buy food.

One thing is clear in respect of the migrants in Brazil we have been able to interview: already existing precarities have been intensified; the coronavirus outbreak has acted like a "burning glass" on social inequalities that already existed.

Eva Bahl & Lucas Cé Sangalli
Munich/Berlin, Germany, July 2020

4. Interviews with refugees in Western Europe

4.1. Interviews with refugees in Germany

4.1.1. General findings

At the end of February and the beginning of March 2020 the German government implemented a bundle of measures in reaction to the increase in the number of Covid-19 infections in Germany, the global dimension of the spread of the disease, and its massive consequences in other countries (such as Italy). From mid-March 2020, extensive restrictions were imposed in all areas of life. These measures (including the closure of public educational institutions and of cultural facilities, the introduction of short-time work and "working from home") were primarily aimed at reduc-

³⁶ Airports are closed and anyhow they cannot afford the flight tickets as they have been living on their savings for the past few months.

ing contact frequency in order to slow down the spread of the virus and to counteract the threat of a breakdown of the healthcare system ("flatten the curve"). Unlike in other countries, this did not mean a complete "lockdown": public and private infrastructure which was necessary for basic livelihood security continued to be accessible under certain conditions. Meetings in groups were forbidden, but moving in public spaces alone (e.g. taking walks or jogging) was still permitted. The implementation of these comprehensive measures was closely linked to the development of infection rates, and many of them were gradually revoked as the rates dropped.

The official reaction in Germany was, and still is, deeply embedded in the federal structure of the country's political system. The debate on the design and implementation of measures took place primarily between the government and federal ministries, the governments and ministries of the federal states, and the responsible regional and local authorities (especially health authorities). Within this federal structure, there were political disputes between the various groups of actors about the most "appropriate" way of reacting. On the other hand, the strong federal administrative structure proved capable of dealing with the pandemic: procedures and measures (e.g. the recording of "Covid-19 cases") have – after initial coordination difficulties – become increasingly institutionalized and locally established, and are mediated locally. Legally, the possibility of restricting fundamental rights and public life in the event of a pandemic is based on a nationwide "Infection Protection Act".

From the very beginning, government measures and the public discourse in Germany about "Covid-19" was strongly shaped by the voices of experts in the healthcare system. Daily assessments of the development of infection figures and possible measures (e.g. in podcasts, TV news) by representatives of the Robert Koch Institute (a federal authority for infection control) or virologists have had considerable visibility and strong weight in the public discourse.

In recent weeks, various groups of actors in Germany have been increasingly pushing for a relaxation of measures. They have shown concern about the economic consequences of a continuing "lockdown", and the overburdening of people involved in nursing and care work. Also, (far) right political movements and actors are increasingly trying to benefit politically from the situation by framing the government measures as an indicator of growing totalitarianism and rule against the "will of the people".³⁷ In contrast to the current tendency to accelerate the end of restrictions, the possibility of a "second wave of infection" in the autumn is also being discussed in public discourses.

Despite the relatively successful political measures taken so far to contain the pandemic in Germany, it should not be forgotten that – as in other countries – the coronavirus crisis is embedded in existing social inequalities. Some dimensions of these inequalities (e.g. precarious housing conditions; precarious employment in caring professions, slaughterhouses and agriculture; the situation of single parents) have become more visible in media discourses than they were before the crisis, even if only briefly and in a particular way. The topic of refugees and their housing conditions (e.g. in refugee camps), on the other hand, has hardly been mentioned in the public debate.

³⁷ Polls on the level of public acceptance of the measures taken by the government show that the very high level of agreement in March (over 90%) has decreased over the course of the last few weeks. See: (<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/coronavirus-corona-krise-einschraenkungen-lockerungen-umfragen-1.4921963>; 10.07.2020).

Our last period of intensive field research in Berlin³⁸ took place immediately before the pandemic became the dominant topic in Germany, affecting all areas of life. As a result, we were directly concerned about how the situation of our interviewees* would change. We are currently in regular contact with a total of nine refugees living in Germany with whom we had previously conducted interviews.

Comparing the situations of our interviewees in Brazil and western Europe, including Germany, under the conditions of the pandemic allowed us as a project team to reflect on the differing importance of informal economies, the relevance of diverging state contexts, and the meaning of family networks. In Brazil, the collapse of opportunities to work in the informal economic sector had serious consequences for our migrant interviewees. One of the central aspects of this was that they were now unable to fulfil the expectations of the family network in their country of origin that they would send money. By contrast, our interviewees in Germany, whose migration projects are much more strongly focused on realizing or expanding "individual" chances of participation, reflected that the governmental requirements during the coronavirus crisis should be seen as a kind of latency period to be accepted. We were surprised at the high level of acceptance that the contact restrictions imposed by the government met with among our interviewees. This was comparable with the Jordanian context described above. This was surprising to us because our previous findings had revealed a conflictual relationship between refugees and the state authorities.

However, we found that refugees' perceptions of the crisis situation in Germany depended to a large extent on the dynamics of the "arrival" phase, being allowed to stay and participate, and the different framings of the refugees' migration projects. The following case examples show the differences, and that the issues that we continue to pursue in the project are clearly reflected in the follow-up-interviews we conducted during the Covid-19 crisis. In concrete terms, differences are evident with regard to the question of...

- a) ...to what extent and due to which favourable factors the refugee's migration project has moved in the direction of "individual" establishment in Germany
- b) ...how strongly his or her migration project is interwoven with family figurations and expectations
- c) ...how the issue of residence status is experienced and dealt with.

For example, a follow-up interview on the Covid-19 situation with **Sunny** (born about 1992), a refugee from the Senegambia region (in Senegal), made it clear that he is in a relatively stable position in Berlin in terms of opportunities for participation and with relatively good prospects. Here, our interim findings on the components that brought about this achievement of a more established position were that besides a relatively secure residence status and a secure apprenticeship with a public company, *Sunny was above all not under much pressure to support his family in Senegal*. The follow-up interview (26.05.2020; conducted by Arne Worm in German) made it clear that Sunny considered his current situation to be part of a collective position that was acceptable, which is why – according to him – he adhered closely to the official rules in his everyday practice (including avoiding contact with others). Sunny said that he closely followed the discourse in the public media. At the same time, in the follow-up discussion we also talked about his previous family and personal experiences with diseases and epidemics. In his case, this was experience of cholera in a family con-

³⁸ Field work for the project "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany" from 21.02. to 29.02.2020. The team consisted of Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu, Margherita Cusmano, Gabriele Rosenthal, Tim Sievert, Tom Weiss and Arne Worm.

text (a grandmother had contracted cholera and was taken to hospital with support from a relative living abroad).

Another case that similarly represents a process of gradual 'individual' stabilization of life in Germany is that of **Maruf** (follow-up interview: 27.03.2020; 09.04.2020). Maruf (born in the early 1990s) has a Kurdish background and fled from the Kobane region in Syria to Germany, where he has now been living for five years. We have been in contact with him for many years now. In the follow-up interviews on Covid-19, he spoke mainly about his concern that a preparatory course for university studies had been postponed. In contrast to the case of Sunny, however, Maruf's establishment project is more ambivalently entangled with family ties. The significance of his uncertainty as to whether the university course will take place only becomes apparent if we consider his case history: working towards a university degree (in Germany) represents a considerable constant and a form of biographical work during the course of his flight from a very precarious situation in Syria. In the face of the decision to flee from Syria – and to improve his "individual" future perspective – Maruf has struggled repeatedly to this day with the question of loyalty to his family and his Kurdish "we" group, and whether he should have stayed in Syria. Correspondingly, the postponement of his preparatory course due to the Covid-19 crisis endangers a component that gives meaning to his entire escape project. It also joins a whole series of situations during his flight in which Maruf has had to "wait for something" and has experienced himself as passive. In this context, it should be mentioned that he said he was appreciative of the fact that we had been interested in his situation for many years, and especially so now that he was in a very difficult situation because of having to avoid contact with others.

This dynamic of a gradual process of (re-)establishing life in Germany being interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic can also be seen in the case of **Miran** from Syria. Tim Sievert, who works as a student assistant in our project, contacted the young man he had interviewed together with Ahmed Albaba for a follow-up interview on the Covid-19 crisis (03.04.2020; follow-up interview in German). He describes Miran's situation as follows:

"Miran was born in 1995 into a Syrian-Kurdish-Arab family and comes from the north of Syria. I talked to him mainly about his worries that he will not be able to complete the training he started at a large company. The associated vocational school has postponed all training courses indefinitely, which makes Miran fear that he will not be able to successfully complete the required exams next year. This experience is reinforced by his desire to distance himself from his own family and especially from his own father, who repeatedly intervened against his flight to Germany. This means that the legitimacy of his flight is increasingly being questioned by the family as well." (Tim Sievert, 08.07.2020)³⁹

The cases mentioned above and the migration projects of these refugees in Germany have been seriously affected by the current measures to contain the pandemic, and further research will show the long-term consequences of this. At the same time, however, these cases are good examples of relatively successful "individual" attempts to become established in Germany.

The following case of Hamid from Guinea (4.1.2), presented by our student assistant Tom Weiss, shows how significant the perception of the pandemic is for a refugee who, on the one hand, is in a vulnerable situation with regard to his residence status,

³⁹ This case study is a part of Tim Sievert's master's thesis on Syrian refugees in Germany, which he is writing under the supervision of G. Rosenthal and will submit at the University of Göttingen in August 2020.

and, on the other hand, has to negotiate the expectation of his family that he will send remittances, i.e. money sent to the family in the country of origin.

The report by our colleague Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu concerns the situation of Kurdish women who have fled to Germany (4.1.3). She shows that negotiations in respect of residence status in Germany have become more intense during the "Covid-19 period" and that the biographical planning of these women is considerably hindered by these negotiations.

Arne Worm
Göttingen, Germany, July 2020

4.1.2 Experiencing "Covid-19" in Germany with an extremely precarious residence status

Hamid's perspective on the coronavirus situation interprets the government measures to contain the virus and their effects on everyday life as a significant threat to his migration and establishment project.⁴⁰ As part of the project "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany", my colleague Margherita Cusmano and I conducted a biographical-narrative interview with Hamid in February 2020. Within two months, we conducted three more follow-up interviews and remained in contact with him. The framing of the interviews was initially strongly influenced by Hamid's assumption that Margherita, and especially I, as a German and local expert, could help him with his asylum proceedings and upgrade his status in Germany. His behaviour towards us was initially influenced by the question of how he could improve his participation opportunities and become more established.

During the coronavirus crisis, Margherita Cusmano and I were in telephone contact with Hamid and were able to learn more about his current situation and his perspective. In addition, Hamid and I met in person for a follow-up interview while maintaining social distancing and hygiene measures.

In 2020 – according to him – Hamid is 18 years old and originally comes from Guinea. He says that in Germany he was first treated as an unaccompanied minor. However, at the beginning of 2018, in the context of his asylum proceedings, medical officers declared he was 18, in contradiction of his own claim that he was 16. As a result, he was no longer treated as a minor. Here, I follow the information he gave me about his age. He told me that his parents died in a local conflict when he was 11. Due to family disputes with his stepmothers and his increasing lack of rights within the family constellation, which arose in connection with his inheritance claim in respect of his father's property, Hamid decided to leave the family. His difficult migration course, which was associated with traumatizing experiences of violence, led him to Germany in 2017.

His application for asylum was turned down, and now he lives in a very precarious situation and is in constant danger of being deported. However, he attends a middle school (*Hauptschule*) and is about to take his final exams.

In the follow-up interviews, Hamid expressed his approval of the government measures. However, he was concerned about the state's interference in his life and, above all, his school career, which is now at risk. Both fears are closely linked to his insecure residence status and the constant fear of deportation. When the schools were closed just as Hamid was about to take his final exams, he could not study for

⁴⁰ This case study is a part of Tom Weiss' master's thesis on the experiences of refugees from West Africa in Germany, which he is writing at the University of Kassel under the supervision of Prof. Dr. M. Bereswill and the co-supervision of Dr. A. Worm.

them, unlike his classmates, as he does not have a computer. This endangers his chances of staying in Germany on a more permanent basis and experiencing participation. He sees gaining a school leaving certificate as the only way to avoid being deported. This stressful situation is complicated by the fact that his family expects him to send them money. He can only fulfil this expectation if he is able to find employment, and for this a school leaving certificate is required. His current precarious situation is further aggravated by the memory of traumatic experiences which, as a result of (self-)isolation, cannot currently be counteracted by social contacts. At the same time, Hamid interprets the situation "during the Corona-19 crisis" in Germany as being better than in Guinea. He explains this when we talk about Ebola. He argues that "Covid-19 is worse than Ebola" because the Covid-19 virus has global effects. Hamid also describes the consequences of the Covid-19 virus in Africa as being more dangerous than in Europe. In Guinea, for example, according to Hamid, basic services are threatened by closed markets and shops, and increased military and police presence; renewed violent conflicts are exacerbating local social tensions.⁴¹ The government has also imposed a night curfew, banned assemblies, ordered the wearing of face coverings, and closed Guinea's borders. According to Hamid, the people in Guinea do not adhere to government regulations to the same extent as in Germany.

Tom Weiss
Göttingen, Germany, July 2020

4.1.3. Kurdish migrants and refugees in Germany

In the context of a project entitled "*Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany – Processes of inclusion and participation in the context of so-called irregular migration*", I am conducting a study on Kurdish migrants in Germany, mostly women, who fled from Turkey to avoid political prosecution because of their political activities around the Kurdish rights movement. My political background is worth mentioning here, because it helps me gain access to the field. I had to flee Turkey as a scholar-at-risk to avoid the political persecution and prospective prosecution inflicted by the Turkish government on a group of scholars commonly known as "Academics for Peace" who signed a petition in 2016 criticizing the government's policies against Kurds in Turkey. Thanks to my status as one of those academics, I have been able to establish contact with possible interviewees through common acquaintances in Germany, and to gain their trust, even though I do not belong to the Kurdish ethnic grouping. Furthermore, they have shown their appreciation by telling me that it is very courageous for a non-Kurd to be interested in and work on the Kurdish cause. As one of them put it: "We are born into this conflict, you chose to be involved." I have conducted four biographical narrative interviews, as well as participant observations, among Kurds in Germany since 2019, up to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and three follow-up interviews since the outbreak.

The Turkish government has downplayed the threat and the implications of the Covid-19 outbreak since March 2020. Already facing an economic crisis, the measures it has taken in respect of the pandemic have mostly been based on economic concerns and, therefore, inconsistent and superficial. What has been especially striking is the continuation of the government's repression of Kurdish politicians and municipalities in Kurdish cities. At the same time, the persecution and prosecution of Kurdish and other oppositional activists has continued unabated. Calls for the

⁴¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/guinea-protesters-killed-clashes-police-200513071249521.html>

release of detained political activists who are in high-risk groups have fallen on deaf ears.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, I have tried to keep in touch with my interviewees, and I have conducted follow-up interviews with them, mostly via WhatsApp and recently also in person. Based on three follow-up interviews (in Turkish) with the Kurdish women and monitoring of their social media accounts, my first insights regarding Kurdish migrants in Germany during the coronavirus crisis point to an emerging dilemma and changing priorities. A possible suspension of compulsory residence in refugee centres due to the pandemic has made the asylum process in Germany more appealing. It is striking that the two Kurdish women whom I will introduce in more detail below are considering applying for political asylum more seriously due to their current situation. So far, with the student visas they had, they were able to avoid applying for asylum in order not to completely relinquish the possibility of visiting Turkey⁴² and to avoid having to stay in refugee centres for extended periods.⁴³ With the increased risk of losing family members and a possible suspension of the obligation to stay in camps for new refugees, the dilemma is bigger than ever.

One of these women is **Eda**, who was born in 1988, and arrived in Germany in 2017. She escaped from political persecution in Turkey after she was accused of supporting and being the girlfriend of an alleged terrorist in 2017. She is now a student at a university in Germany and is in the process of writing her M.A. thesis. She used to be a photojournalist and is working as a freelancer in Germany. She was about to start a new job as a journalist in Cologne when I interviewed her before the Covid-19 outbreak, but she has now lost that opportunity due to the contact restrictions. She has an approaching deadline to finish her M.A. thesis, but it seems very unlikely that she will meet it, as she had no motivation even before the pandemic started. In this case, she will have to apply for asylum, which will probably be granted, given the lawsuits filed against her. She is currently living with her boyfriend and not too stressed about getting infected; she is more concerned about being confined at home.

The other Kurdish woman, **Hale**, with whom I conducted a face-to-face follow-up interview at the beginning of July 2020, is in a very precarious situation both because of the pandemic and because of the many lawsuits against her in Turkey. She has been doing a PhD in social sciences in Hamburg since she arrived in Germany in 2019. She spent most of the lockdown in bed in her dormitory and was very depressed. Yet, what happened very recently has put her in a more difficult situation. She went to a Turkish consulate at the beginning of July to get a power of attorney to let a lawyer follow her trials in Turkey, but her passport was confiscated by the officials working at the consulate due to an arrest warrant in her name. It was a kind of trap, because they asked for her passport for identification, which could easily be done via her national ID, without telling her about the warrant of arrest. She spent six hours at the consulate but could not get her passport back. Her student visa in Germany is due to expire in a month, and without a passport she cannot apply for an extension. Her lawyer suggested she should apply for asylum, because, as the lawyer

⁴² Refugee and asylum policies and procedures in Germany are very complicated and contingent on many factors; thus, the following information is meant to give only a general idea of the current situation of our interviewees. After being granted asylum in Germany, asylees are not allowed to visit the countries they come from as this implies that they do not need the protection of the German government. They can only visit their country after obtaining German citizenship and thus a German passport, a process which takes at least five years.

⁴³ Compulsory residence in a refugee processing centre in Germany can last up to 18 months, if not more, until the result of the application for asylum arrives. The duration of stay varies from state to state in the Federal Republic and depends also on the status of the country of the origin, i.e. whether it is accepted as a safe country or not by Germany.

told her, due to the Covid-19 contact restrictions, she would not have to stay in a refugee centre after submitting her application. She does not want to apply even though it would now be “easier” for her to obtain asylum, because, very optimistically, she wants to be able to go to Turkey if and when she wins all the lawsuits against her, or in case her parents' health worsens. This has a lot to do with her family's vulnerable situation in respect of the Covid-19 crisis. Both of her parents are at high risk as cancer patients. She was planning to go to Turkey in October before the confiscation of her passport, but she would have been arrested at the Turkish airport if she had tried to do so.

It is really interesting that for both Eda and Hale asylum has become a more “attractive” option during the Covid-19 crisis. Yet, because of their increasing sense of responsibility towards their families, this is not an easy decision. Being prohibited from visiting Turkey for at least five years seems to be a heavy price to pay in Covid-19 times. The other most common side effect of the contact restrictions on Kurdish migrants is the cancellation of German or integration courses. For many people, these courses are their sole chance to socialize in Germany and provide a sense of purpose, and their lack seems to put an extra burden on them in these hard times.

Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu
Göttingen, Germany, July 2020

4.2. Refugees in Italy

The pandemic hit Italy very hard with a quickly rising number of infections and people dying from the end of February. Italy was the first country in Europe to introduce a country-wide lockdown in March, while the healthcare system was completely overwhelmed by the situation.

After the first outbreak was detected in Codogno, a small town in the north Italian province of Lodi (Lombardy), and later in Vò (Veneto), new infections quickly soared in other towns and municipalities. In Nembro and Alzano Lombardo, two municipalities in the province of Bergamo, also in Lombardy, the number of cases increased exponentially at the end of February. Thriving industrial hubs, these municipalities were not subjected to a lockdown until the infection had spread to the provinces of Bergamo, Cremona, Brescia and Milan, all situated in Lombardy, and hospitals had become hotspots of Covid-19. After an initial delay, the whole region of Lombardy and other north Italian provinces were put under lockdown on the 13th of March. Only two days later, the lockdown measures were enforced country-wide. Schools, theatres and cinemas were closed and public events cancelled. During the following month, movement was rigidly restricted and non-essential businesses were closed. Travel was only permitted for essential reasons, like work or return to one's own residence, which had to be proved by a self-declaration. The police and the army patrolled the streets and set up checkpoints. Non-permitted travel and breaches of the quarantine measures were punishable with fines and prison terms.

In this report, I will discuss the heavy repercussions of the crisis on a refugee, **Amadou** from Mali. I had been in touch with him since our first interview in January 2020 in the context of my research on refugees who had been deported from Germany to Italy⁴⁴.

I contacted Amadou during the Covid-19 outbreak, at first by phone, when the country-wide lockdown was in place, and then met him personally twice in June

⁴⁴ This case study will be a part of my master's thesis on African refugees in western Europe, which I am writing under the supervision of G. Rosenthal and will submit at the University of Göttingen.

2020 in Bergamo, the city where he lives and my home town. He comes from the south-east of Mali and, because of inheritance conflicts after the death of his father, his mother had to leave the household and migrated to Gao with him. When the civil war broke out, he first fled to Algeria, where he lived for three years; he then moved to Libya and reached Italy in 2015. After being expelled from a reception centre in 2015, he became homeless and lived in the cities of Bergamo, Milan and Como. During this period, he experienced health problems related to the respiratory system (coughing up blood). He never went to a doctor.

In Lombardy, undocumented migrants have access to the hospital system, but they are not assigned a family doctor. They have to come to the hospital themselves and then ask for a code called "STP". Obviously, they have to know about it first and they have to be assertive and demonstrate awareness of their rights with the hospital clerks, who often refuse to issue this code. Francophone migrants also need to master the Italian language, since clerks seldom speak French (English is more frequently spoken). To complicate the situation, different hospitals – even in the same province – often have uncoordinated bureaucratic procedures. As I experienced when I was working as an intern for a medical office providing undocumented immigrants with primary care (02.2018-07.2018), many people also fear being reported to the police. During my internship I met a woman who had been suffering from third-degree burns on her whole body for a couple of days, because she was too scared to go the emergency room. Amadou, being illiterate and barely getting by with the Italian language, had little chance of accessing hospital care. The voluntary association where I did my internship (which is the only one, as far as I know, for the whole province of Bergamo; similar projects exist in Milan and other cities in Lombardy) had to be closed during the Covid-19 outbreak. Some of the patients stayed for the months of March and April 2020 without essential medication (for instance, for diabetes).

The homeless shelter where Amadou is now living had to close its food kitchen, and was only able to provide homeless people in Bergamo with take-away cold food. Other homeless shelters had to close because of lack of volunteers or protective equipment. Parks and many public spaces (like libraries and cafés) were closed, so that the homeless faced difficulties in finding shelter. Around the central station in Bergamo, and in many other cities in Lombardy, many (former) asylum seekers now live in informal settlements. Those who were working in the informal sector saw their livelihoods threatened almost overnight. My impression when strolling around the city centre is that the police presence is greater in these low-income and migrant neighbourhoods.

Amadou was not disturbed by this and said vehemently that he had never experienced racism. This perception (or assertion) could be related to his marginalized position itself and to his reliance on Catholic voluntary organizations (which are right now being investigated for embezzlement and the exploitation of migrant labour), which frame their assistance as benevolence without challenging structural racism. When asked about episodes of racism, he answered with a list of volunteers – in Germany and Italy – who had helped him. Two other interviewees, one from Nigeria and the other from Mali, with whom I conducted ethnographical interviews, told me of specifically health-related racism: they said that in Algeria and in Italy people shouted "hey Ebola!" at them, as if it were their first name.

Amadou is living in a precarious and highly stigmatized situation, in an overcrowded homeless shelter, sleeping in bunk beds with many other people, which makes social distancing impossible. Still, despite his vulnerable situation, the Catholic organization that provided him with shelter also offered him some security. Unlike other homeless shelters, he does not have to apply every night or every week for a place to stay. He

is allowed to stay in the inner courtyard during the day, which is not possible in other homeless shelters because they do not have the necessary infrastructure, and he is provided with one meal per day. In general, he is not worried about Covid-19 and he does not keep himself informed about the development of the pandemic, either at the local level or at the national or international levels. Even when some of Bergamo's municipalities had eleven times the average mortality⁴⁵, he did not know if the number of infections was rising or decreasing. He does not have a television, cannot read with ease, and speaks only basic Italian. He asked me repeatedly, during the lockdown and at the peak of the outbreak, if we could meet personally, despite the mandatory shelter-in-place orders.

Our interaction was shaped by our positionalities as interviewer and interviewee. Especially my frantic return to Italy (my home country) from Germany (where I live) was a topic that obviously sparked his interest. Having been deported from Germany – where he lived for some months in 2016 – back to Italy, under the terms of the Dublin system, and having experienced strict residency rules during his first three months in Germany⁴⁶, he suffered from significant restrictions to his freedom of movement. For obvious reasons, he would be unable to return to Mali, where his mother and his sister still live, should they fall ill. In this context, the fact that I was subjected to border controls by the Swiss police astonished and intrigued him, showing how ingrained the perception of white Europeans and their freedom of movement is. This revealed a fundamental asymmetry, because while I was able to cross borders to join my family members who were sick with Covid-19, this is something which was impossible for most refugees and other migrants even before the pandemic.

Margherita Cusmano
Bergamo, Italy, July 2020

⁴⁵ ISTAT, Tavola decessi per 7.270 comuni (18.06.2020) <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/240401>.

⁴⁶ The German asylum law (§ 56) lays down that asylum seekers and "tolerated" refugees must not leave the place of residence assigned to them within the Federal Republic of Germany.

COVID-19 and the making of an intellectual bubble

Anonymous

I have been living through the COVID-19 pandemic in one of China's metropolitan centres. Originally from Europe, I moved to China a few years ago, to take up a university position in the social sciences. Prior to my arrival, I had been doing research and collaborating closely with Chinese colleagues for approximately a long time. For social researchers in China, the pandemic seems to have exacerbated and accelerated a trend that was already underway for a few years prior to its beginning. For a few years now, a marked curtailment of academic freedom appears to have been underway, particularly in the social sciences. As part of this curtailment, for example, it has become difficult, at least in social research, to access foreign academic books and journals in China, to hold academic events with more than a small number of foreign academics, to gain permission to attend conferences abroad, and to debate certain topics that are regarded 'sensitive', to use local parlance. My Chinese colleagues also have to take part in regular political indoctrination activities, such as week-long ideological study sessions at a hotel in the countryside or mandatory daily engagement with an indoctrination app on their smartphones. At the same time, Chinese colleagues who might have been open towards collaboration and frank discussion five or ten years ago may now be reticent to speak to foreign colleagues such as me at all.

I write of this only in vague terms because the origins, reasons, and patterns behind these developments remain opaque to foreign academics such as me. I have seen enough and heard enough from colleagues to be certain that academic freedom is being curtailed in roughly the ways I have described. However, the policies for higher education governance that might be behind this are not disclosed, and certain measures, such as refusals of permission to attend foreign conferences, are never explained.

COVID-19 is making all this much worse. I regularly read Western news via VPN software that unlocks all the many websites that are censored here. While there has been so much discussion (much of it quite wrongheaded) about China's handling of the pandemic, one trend seems to have gone largely unnoticed. By this I mean the formation of an intellectual bubble within which knowledge of the social world is filtered exclusively through the thought management of the Communist Part of China, by way of overt propaganda and more subtle forms of organizing the ways in which people think and feel about the world. Views that exist outside this intellectual bubble, notably foreign perspectives on China and the world, are being rendered unacceptable and invisible.

This intellectual bubble was already in the making through the developments that I described above. Now China's borders are closed indefinitely to foreigners, the visas of all foreigners currently outside China have been cancelled, and the authorities are promoting an ultranationalist discourse that blames the pandemic on foreigners while praising the Party's ability to keep Chinese people safe from the virus. Many of my foreign colleagues have

been stranded abroad, often with serious difficulties, as their homes are in China and they cannot access their Chinese bank accounts while out of the country. Nobody can tell when they might be able to return. Here in China, I have been hearing rumours, many of them unfortunately unverifiable, about foreign academics who have had their profiles deleted from their university websites, been interrogated about their academic ties in the USA, or even let go from their jobs at Chinese universities. For me, academic life in China has acquired a claustrophobic texture.

These events in Chinese academic are in themselves worthy of further discussion. Sadly, though, they seem to form part of a broader international trend towards academic nationalism and intellectual bordering. I entered academic in a world in which one could enjoy international mobility and find an intellectual home outside one's country of origin. As COVID-19 enables the elevation of hard and tall borders around the world, I feel as if this world had ended.

The Situation in Brazil

Hermílio Santos

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to share with all of you a little of the the anxiety (I would also say fear) we are experiencing in Brazil in the last months and specially last weeks and days. The totalitarian project of Bolsonaro became even more explicit and violent, especially because of the reaction of the Supreme Court, that is trying to limit his despotic actions against those that don't share with him the same ideas, against the indigenous population, against the environment, and I should say against humanity, considering his behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fortunately, in the last days there are some reactions with intellectuals, lawyers, and politicians from all political spectrum, from left, centre and even right subscribing manifesto published in the most important newspapers and in the social media. Besides this, young people are organizing antifascist protests at the same time and place as the supporters of Bolsonaro. So far these protests are peaceful. But the President and his closer supporters are explicit referring to the possibility of a coup. We really don't know if it would be sufficient to block the totalitarian project (explicitly inspired by the Nazi and Fascist Regimes).

By my side in the last month I publish everyday a short analysis of the political crises in Instagram, Facebook and You Tube. I reach very few people, but still it is important to speak up, especially for friends and students. I send two examples, each day on a different topic of the crises: the first one is on the "Bolsonaro' totalitarian project", and the other "Bolsonaro and the extermination of the indigenous people".

Besides this, I am sending you the **Basta!** Manifesto published today, subscribed by lawyers, and the Manifesto "**Estamos Juntos**" (published yesterday), subscribed initially by a enormous list of intellectuals, politicians, and artists from all different political orientation pro-Democracy. It is everything in Portuguese, but it is just to give you an idea of some kind of resistance we are fortunately having. And the most important institutional support is coming from our Supreme Court, although the Judges are facing death threat by the Bolsonaro's supporters. Right now, we are at least 70% (probably more) that are in favor to impeach Bolsonaro.

I am a little sorry to share all these thinks with all of you, but I and my colleagues, and friends are really scared to what could happen next to the country and to ourselves, if Bolsonaro is not removed under democratic rules as soon as possible.

Although the situation is terrible for all of you too, I hope you are doing well during the pandemic.

Bolsonaro e o extermínio dos povos indígenas. Por Hermílio Santos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpkHNBqwig&t=32s>



– MANIFESTO ESTAMOS JUNTOS –

Somos cidadãos, cidadãos, empresas, organizações e instituições brasileiras e fazemos parte da maioria que defende a vida, a liberdade e a democracia.

Somos a maioria e exigimos que nossos representantes e lideranças políticas exerçam com afino e dignidade seu papel diante da devastadora crise sanitária, política e econômica que atravessa o país.

Somos a maioria de brasileiras e brasileiros que apoia a independência dos poderes da República e clamamos que lideranças partidárias, prefeitos, governadores, vereadores, deputados, senadores, procuradores e juízes assumam a responsabilidade de unir a pátria e resgatar nossa identidade como nação.

Somos mais de dois terços da população do Brasil e invocamos que partidos, seus líderes e candidatos agora deixem de lado projetos individuais de poder em favor de um projeto comum de país.

Somos muitos, estamos juntos, e formamos uma frente ampla e diversa, suprapartidária, que valoriza a política e trabalha para que a sociedade responda de maneira mais madura, consciente e eficaz aos crimes e desmandos de qualquer governo.

Como aconteceu no movimento Diretas Já, é hora de deixar de lado velhas disputas em busca do bem comum. Esquerda, centro e direita unidos para defender a lei, a ordem, a política, a ética, as famílias, o voto, a ciência, a verdade, o respeito e a valorização da diversidade, a liberdade de imprensa, a importância da arte, a preservação do meio ambiente e a responsabilidade na economia.

Defendemos uma administração pública reverente à Constituição, audaz no combate à corrupção e à desigualdade, verdadeiramente comprometida com a educação, a segurança e a saúde da população. Defendemos um país mais desenvolvido, mais feliz e mais justo.

Temos ideias e opiniões diferentes, mas comungamos dos mesmos princípios éticos e democráticos. Queremos combater o ódio e a apatia com afeto, informação, união e esperança.

Vamos #JUNTOS sonhar e fazer um Brasil que nos traga de volta a alegria e o orgulho de ser brasileiro.

BASTA!

“Menos conhecido é o paradoxo da tolerância: a tolerância ilimitada pode levar ao desaparecimento da tolerância. Se estendermos a tolerância ilimitada até àqueles que são intolerantes; se não estivermos preparados para defender uma sociedade tolerante contra os ataques dos intolerantes, o resultado será a destruição dos tolerantes e, com eles, da tolerância...”

KARL POPPER

Basta!

O Brasil, suas instituições, seu povo não podem continuar a ser agredidos por alguém que, ungido democraticamente ao cargo de presidente da República, exerce o nobre mandato que lhe foi conferido para arruinar com os alicerces de nosso sistema democrático, atentando, a um só tempo, contra os Poderes Legislativo e Judiciário, contra o Estado de Direito, contra a saúde dos brasileiros, agindo despidoradamente, à luz do dia, incapaz de demonstrar qualquer espírito cívico ou de compaixão para com o sofrimento de tantos.

Basta!

A Constituição Federal diz expressamente que são crimes de responsabilidade os atos do presidente da República que atentem contra o livre exercício do Poder Legislativo, do Poder Judiciário, do Ministério Público e dos Poderes constitucionais das unidades da Federação e contra o cumprimento das leis e das decisões judiciais (artigo 85, incisos II e VII).

Pois bem, o presidente da República faz de sua rotina um recorrente ataque aos Poderes da República, afronta-os sistematicamente. Agrede de todas as formas os Poderes constitucionais das unidades da Federação, empenhados todos em salvar vidas. Descumpra leis e decisões judiciais diuturnamente

porque, afinal, se intitula a própria Constituição. O país é jogado ao precipício de uma crise política quando já imerso no abismo de uma pandemia que encontra no Brasil seu ambiente mais favorável, mercê de uma ação genocida do presidente da República.

Basta!

Nós profissionais do direito, dos mais diferentes matizes políticos e ideológicos, os que vivem a primavera de suas carreiras, os que chegam ao outono de suas vidas profissionais, todos nós temos em comum a crença de que viver sob a égide do Direito é uma conquista civilizatória. Todos nós temos a firme convicção de que o Direito só tem sentido quando for promotor da justiça. Todos nós acreditamos que é preciso dar um BASTA a esta noite de terror com que se está pretendendo cobrir este país.

Não nos omitiremos. E temos a certeza de que os Poderes da República não se ausentarão.

Cobramos a responsabilidade de todos os que pactuam com essa situação, na forma da lei e do direito, sejam meios de comunicação, financiadores, provedores de redes sociais. Ideias contrárias ao Estado e ao Direito não podem mais ser aceitas. Sejamos intolerantes com os intolerantes!



CONFERENCES

Fourth ISA Forum of Sociology

Online, February 23-27, 2021



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The banner features a light blue background with a geometric pattern. At the bottom left, there is a graphic of four stylized human figures in blue, orange, grey, and red, with the text 'likely online!' written diagonally across them. The ISA logo is positioned to the right of the figures, and the website URL is at the bottom right.



Workshop

Research Ethics in Biography Research
University of Crete, Rethymnon, Campus Gallou

!! New date: Friday 14th – Sunday 16th May 2021 !!

Greek Association of Oral History

Section Biography Research of the German Sociological Association (DGS)

RC 38 Biography and Society, International Sociological Association (ISA)

Department of Sociology, University of Crete

In this workshop we will discuss and reflect on ethical questions in biography research. The adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by the European Union in May 2018 has made us all more aware of the various ethical challenges involved in biographical research. Researchers have to reflect and adequately deal with a number of ethical questions and challenges in the field research process. The different challenges concern the research relationship or research alliance with regard to questions of trust, power hierarchies, and mutual as well as differing interests concerning research questions, aims, and procedures. Furthermore, questions arise regarding “informed consent” as an ongoing process and a dialogue, the moral and legal rights of research participants, the notion of authenticity and truth of the narrated life stories, issues of confidentiality, and protection of sensitive personal data. Finally, there are questions that concern the archiving of biographical data and the social and political consequences for secondary analysis or public accessibility.

In the first part of the workshop we will discuss and reflect on current theoretical issues relating to ethics in qualitative research, with a focus on ethical questions in biography research. In the second part of the workshop we will discuss ethical dilemmas and challenges that arise in the field of biographical research, when conducting biographical-narrative interviews and carrying out reconstructive biographical case analysis. In this part of the workshop participants will have an opportunity to present and discuss ethical challenges that they have encountered in the research process or in the public presentation of their work.

We would like to invite PhD students and other scholars who are working with biographical methods to participate in our workshop and discuss the ethical challenges they have encountered in their research practice.

For organizational reasons the number of participants of the workshop is limited. ~~Please register for the workshop by 30th March 2020~~ (see contact details for organizers below). There is no fee for registration.

Organizers:

Prof. Dr. Giorgos Tsiolis, University of Crete, E-Mail: tsiolisg@uoc.gr

Dr. Irini Siouti, Institute for Social Research Frankfurt, E-Mail: siouti@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

Emeritus Prof. Dr. Riki Van Boeschoten, University of Thessaly, E-Mail: rvboes@gmail.com

Program

Welcome and Introduction

Giorgos Tsiolis (University of Crete) & Irini Siouti (Institute for Social Research Frankfurt)

Lecture and Discussion

Hella von Unger (Ludwig-Maximilians University of Munich): "Ethical reflexivity in qualitative biographical research: Food for thought on informed consent, questions of representation and data archiving."

Chair: Riki Van Boeschoten (University of Thessaly)

Research Workshop

Ethical Challenges in Biography Research: Examples from ongoing research projects of the participants.

Chair: Giorgos Tsiolis (University of Crete) & Irini Siouti (Institute for Social Research Frankfurt)

Closing remarks

Location: Department of Sociology, University of Crete, Rethymnon, Campus Gallou

The workshop is organized in cooperation with the section Biography Research of the German Sociological Association, the RC 38 Biography and Society of the International Sociological Association and the Greek Society of Oral History.

Sektion
Biographieforschung

in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie



Ενωση Προφορικής Ιστορίας



Biography
and Society

CONFERENCE REPORT

„Exile – Flight – Persecution / Exil – Flucht – Verfolgung“⁴⁷

Arne Worm / Maria Pohn-Lauggas

„Exile – Flight – Persecution / Exil – Flucht – Verfolgung“ International Conference together with the annual conference of the DGS Section for Biographical Research / Jahrestagung der Sektion Biographieforschung in der DGS

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

28. – 30. November 2019

Organization: Prof. Dr. Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal, Victoria Taboada Gomez, Dr. Nicole Witte, Dr. Arne Worm

The phenomena of “Exile – Flight – Persecution” are everywhere present and discussed today, and yet many facets are ignored or marginalized, whether in public discourses, in collective memories, or in sociological thinking and reflection. These phenomena shape our contemporary social world: people face persecution or deportation, and people’s lives are endangered because of war, armed conflict, violence and other existentially marginalizing constellations. Especially in societies of the Global North, they dominate public discourses, political actions and reactions – although in a very selective and homogenizing manner. In Germany and other European countries, we have witnessed many polarizing and politically charged discussions on migration, bordering and refugees in recent years. We have also witnessed the rise of right-wing parties and movements all across Europe. In the course of the war in Syria, one could observe that the public discourse was opening up, in the sense of talking about flight as a form of migration and documenting the experiences of refugees. The downside of this “awareness”, or increased visibility, was that it operated strictly within the binary logic that differentiates between “refugee migration” and “migration for economic reasons” and reinforces this distinction. In public discussions, refugees were divided into those who have a right to stay and those who do not. And it can be observed that there is homogenization on both sides of the binary public discourse, resulting in constructions of *the* “refugees” and *the* “economic migrants”. One outcome of this is that the experiences and the lifeworlds of the social actors involved are neither included nor acknowledged – a tendency that it is important not to reproduce in sociological reflection and research on these phenomena.

Despite a growing interest in “refugee studies” or research on “forced migration”, far too little attention has been paid, especially in sociological research in western Europe, to reconstructing the social realities of migration in the past and in the present from the perspectives of both immigrants and established groupings. Additionally, there has been very little analysis of interactions and figurations between these different groupings. In addition to this, there is a lack of a historical perspective that recognizes how significantly the histories and realities of contemporary societies *all around the world* have been shaped by processes involving exile, flight and persecu-

⁴⁷ This report has been published in “Rundbrief der Sektion Biographieforschung” (2020), 74. A shortened version in German has been published in „Soziologie. Forum der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie“ (2020), 48 (2), 223-225.

tion. This includes reconstructing the diverging experiences and histories of the groupings and individuals who have fled from violence and persecution. It is important not to reproduce the tendency in social sciences in western European countries to treat processes of persecution and flight, as well as constellations of exile, as marginal phenomena of social realities. We see a need for more research in the social sciences which focuses on these phenomena as fundamentally interwoven with the past and present of the social and political fabric of societies. Thus, we need to reflect on how selective the established views are of people or groupings who have experienced exile, flight or persecution: selective in the sense of focusing on “national containers”, but also in the sense of focusing only on certain groupings, while others – in the past and the present – are marginalized.

Sociological biographical research is one way to counteract homogenization, because the focus is on people's concrete experiences and actions in certain socio-historical contexts. From its very beginning with the study by Thomas and Znaniecki,⁴⁸ biographical research has taken into account the life histories of migrants *before* their migration and the way they are interrelated with the collective histories of their home regions. Furthermore, biographical research is sensitive to the experiences and perspectives of members of marginalized groupings and we-groups.

Besides people's experiences in certain socio-historical contexts, the topic of memory is important in respect of the phenomena of “Exile – Flight – Persecution”. If we go back a hundred years, we will find a long list of major collective events which forced large groupings of people to leave their home region or country of origin. But if we consider hegemonic memory practices, it is obvious that there are memory lapses regarding specific periods, world regions and groupings. Flight and exile are often part of the social unconscious, as can be observed in the countries of western Europe. And in the face of counter memories, researchers, activists and artists need to work hard to bring personal and collective experiences to the surface and make them more visible. Referring again to the countries of western Europe, flight and exile are often not included in, or only on the margins of, dominant national memories which offer narratives explaining “how we have become what we are”. The experiences of those who do not belong to the established groupings in the societies concerned have less chance of being remembered in public arenas. In this sense, “doing memory” is always connected to memory conflicts between marginalized and established groupings and dominant discourses.

These considerations motivated us to organize this international conference. We decided to include constellations and phenomena of “exile”, which is one possible expression of forced migration, flight and persecution, but which is not a very prominent topic in sociological research. It is more commonly treated in history, cultural studies and literary studies. The neglect of this topic in sociology is all the more remarkable since many well-known sociologists, particularly in the first generation, were forced to go into exile because of persecution in Nazi Germany. In this sense, sociology is a discipline which has been done and developed in exile. We only need to think of Theodor W. Adorno, Alfred Schütz, Marie Jahoda, Hannah Arendt or Norbert Elias, to name just a few.

Research on exile has mainly focused on the experiences of victims and survivors of the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, the issues connected with it are of general importance and can offer fruitful insights for understanding current experiences of exile. One focus of the conference is on the need for more research on the social condi-

⁴⁸ Thomas, William Isaac/Znaniecki, Florian (1958 [1918–1922]). *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*. New York: Dover.

tion of people living in exile, including the question of how to make exile more visible as an experience which finds different forms of expression, for instance in the work of exile intellectuals and artists, or when members of the second or third generation feel like exiles in the country of their birth. Making exile visible would be significant not only for sociology, but also for the homogenizing public discourse, because it would help to show that people experience forced migration in very different ways: they define their own status in divergent terms, and they have different statuses in the host country. Instead of viewing refugees as a homogeneous grouping, it is important to see that their experiences differ considerably, depending on their belonging, their social status, and the circumstances of their flight, as well as their situation in the host country, in their own national, ethnic or religious grouping, and in their home country before their migration.

Against this background, the following questions guided the conference: How can we approach migrations resulting from collective violence, or ethnic or political persecution, in ways avoiding the pitfalls of the charged and selective public discourses on migration? How can flight, exile and persecution be studied as empirical phenomena in their interrelationship with the past and present history of the society concerned? Whose experiences and perspectives are made visible or less visible in such studies? These questions were treated during the conference by sociologists, especially in the field of biographical research, as well as by scholars from neighbouring disciplines, and in discussions with international researchers.

Below is a summary of the papers presented and the discussions:

The conference opened with a plenary lecture by Steve Tonah (University of Ghana), who discussed contemporary phenomena of migration from a West African perspective. Tonah showed clearly how shortsighted the dominant European focus on “Europe” as a destination for migrants is. He emphasized the significant influence of the international military intervention in Libya in 2011 on migration in West Africa. He also problematized the hardly justifiable “European” focus on the route across the Mediterranean – and not for example on the greater dangers involved in crossing the Sahara.

This raised the issue of why the complex sociohistorical interrelations and dynamics of violence behind migration phenomena in non-European contexts are largely ignored in Eurocentric perspectives. Many of the following speakers were concerned with this issue and presented their empirical results in respect of different geographical spaces. In the session on “*Migration trajectories*”, Kassoum Dieme (Universidade de Brasília) reflected on how the autobiographical films of Sembène Ousmane offer access to complex dynamics within the African diaspora in South America. Gabriele Rosenthal and Lukas Hofmann (Univ. of Göttingen) took the case of Eritreans who have been deported from Israel to Uganda as the basis for a discussion of the enormously stressful trajectories of people who have escaped from contexts of extreme violence and who live in the present without any future perspectives. Lucas Cé Sangalli (Univ. of Göttingen) used the self-presentations of Sudanese refugees to reconstruct the tabooing of conflict-charged topics connected with collective violence (especially the genocide in Dafur). Fabio Santos (FU Berlin) presented the results of his ethnographic study of migration to French Guayana, thus drawing attention to a migration destination “on the margins” of Europe that has hitherto attracted little attention.

The considerable importance of including a sociohistorical perspective and a consideration of the dynamics of violence was also clearly shown in the session on “*Escaping from war in the Middle East*”. Johannes Becker and Hendrik Hinrichsen (Univ. of Göttingen) discussed the underestimated significance of longstanding transna-

tional and translocal connections for refugees in Amman (Jordan). Arne Worm (Univ. of Göttingen) reflected on the importance of making a detailed reconstruction of diverging migration constellations in the case of refugees fleeing from the war in Syria. Using the example of Afghanistan, Phil Langer and Aisha-Nusrat Ahmad (IPU Berlin) showed the psychosocial consequences of wars and violence, and emphasized the benefits of an interdisciplinary research approach adapted to dealing with trauma. The papers presented in the session on "*Processes of migration and constructions of belonging*" looked at the way migration in the context of violence is closely bound up with constructions of belonging. Eva Bahl (Univ. of Göttingen) illustrated this by discussing the biographies of Moroccans who entered the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla as unaccompanied minors. Myrna Sieden (Göttingen) discussed the connection between flight and violence experienced by women in partnerships. The presentation by Ana Mijić (Univ. of Vienna) showed the potentials of a perspective based on the sociology of knowledge, based on case reconstructions of how Bosnian war refugees in Austria construct their identity.

The main concern of the plenary lecture by Ludger Pries (Univ. of Bochum) was to point out that forced migration has repeatedly played an important role in "European" contexts, in the past and in the present, and that not enough attention is paid to this fact in sociological debates. Pries pleaded in favour of a comparative approach to migration research with a focus on how migrants experience their migration. Many subsequent presentations discussed the issues this raised in respect of the visibility and invisibility of flight and forced migration as experienced by different groupings. In the session on "*Transgenerational memories of migration*", Anita Rotter (Univ. of Innsbruck) discussed how adults in the third generation of "Gastarbeiter" ("visiting workers") in Austria are positioned as "others". Doreen Blume-Peiffer (Univ. of Göttingen) showed how in Roma families from ex-Yugoslavia belonging is negotiated in the light of experiences of suffering and flight. Anna Schnitzer (Univ. of Zurich) presented biographies of refugee families in Switzerland and showed how the way persecution is treated in their family memory processes is interconnected with the production of new practical routines. Rebecca Mörgen and Peter Rieker (Univ. of Zurich) thematized the biographical breaks and experiences of alienation of unaccompanied minors living as refugees in Switzerland. In the session on "*Experiences and narrations of refugees*" Rineke van Daalen and Christien Brinkgreve (Univ. of Amsterdam) discussed the changing role of the "bureaucratic nation state" in respect of how migration is framed. Anja Bartel, Catherine Delcroix and Elise Pape (Univ. of Strasbourg) presented a study of the various effects of immigration policies on people's biographies. The benefit of a comparative approach was shown in the presentation by Maria do Carmo dos Santos Gonçalves (PUCRS), who argued, in the light of examples from Brazil, that scholars need to be more sensitive to the heterogeneity of courses of migration. Júlia Vajda and Juli Szekely (Univ. of Budapest) discussed biographical memories of the Holocaust and places of remembrance in Berlin and in Budapest; in particular, they reflected on the phenomenon of not talking about persecution.

How biographies of political participation are constituted under conditions of exile among members of the second generation of immigrant workers was the theme of the paper presented by Irini Siouti (Univ. of Vienna) in the session on "*Political processes and their biographical consequences – between disempowerment and empowerment*". The presentation by Hilal Akdeniz (Univ. of Frankfurt) was focused on Turks who left their country following the attempted coup in Turkey in July 2016. The papers presented in the session on "*Migration, visibility and political action*" also focused on refugees as political actors. Sevil Çakır-Kılınçoğlu (Univ. of Göttingen) discussed this in the light of the political engagement of Kurds in different contexts of

origin and arrival. Faime Alpogu (Univ. of Vienna) presented a critique of the term “Gastarbeiter” (“visiting worker”) based on image analysis and biographical reconstructions of the experiences of Turkish “Gastarbeiter”. Victoria Taboada Gómez (Univ. of Göttingen) showed how the loss and reconstitution of belonging is negotiated in the course of migration from South America, social transformation (collapse of the DDR), and political engagement.

The session on “*Forced migration and language, collective identity, we- and they-images*” dealt with the significance of language for refugees. Johannes Becker and Hendrik Hinrichsen (Göttingen) took the example of “Arabic dialects in Amman” to show how language competence and the flexible use of language as an instrument of power and a means of placing belonging are decisive in shaping the everyday realities of refugees. Stefan Bernhard and Stefan Röhrer (IAB Nuremberg) reflected on how the knowledge of, or learning of, languages is closely bound up with self-images and expectations in respect of participation. And Bettina Dausien and Nadja Thoma (Univ. of Vienna) demonstrated that the situative and “precarious work of belonging” can be reconstructed from the microstructure of (linguistic) action.

During the conference, it became clear that great benefits can be gained from comparing different sociohistorical contexts, together with relevant individual and collective experiences, and that this requires reflection on the theoretical, disciplinary and methodological challenges connected with research on flight, exile and persecution. This was done, for instance, in the plenary lecture by Christoph Reinprecht (Univ. of Vienna), which considered the history of this discipline, and reconstructed special features of the experience of exile in comparison to other forms of (forced) migration on the basis of autobiographical notes by scholars and writers (such as Bertolt Brecht). Sociology in exile and the sociology of exile is, by the nature of its origin, therefore political, critical and especially *non-identitarian sociology*. In the session on “*Theoretical and methodological reflections on refugee and migration studies*”, Tina Spies (Hochschule Darmstadt), Olaf Tietje and Elisabeth Tuidor (both Univ. of Kassel) discussed the implications of post-migration perspectives for biographical research. Frauke Schacht (Univ. of Innsbruck) showed how a victim-perpetrator logic in contemporary discourses on “refugees” affects their self-positioning. Verena Hücke (Univ. of Kassel) presented some results of her research project on the appropriation of agency by “sexual refugees” in South Africa through the crossing of borders. The plenary lecture by Roswitha Breckner and Faime Alpogu (Univ. of Vienna) focused on the potentials of image analysis. Using images from the *#refugeecameras* project, in which refugees took photographs to document their situation, the speakers showed different ways in which refugees produce “normality”.

In the closing talk, Ursula Apitzsch (Univ. of Frankfurt), co-editor of the German edition of the letters written by Antonio Gramsci while he was in prison, traced the continuity of exile in the biographies and family histories of Gramsci and his wife, Julia Schucht. This presentation focused on the interpretation of Canto X of Dante’s “Inferno” and of Gramsci’s time in prison as “moments of loss in respect of biographical knowledge of the present”.

The papers presented at this conference were related to different groupings, different parts of the world, and different historical periods. Overall, they showed very clearly that current debates on refugees, exile and migration are oversimplified and usually remote from the experiences of the actors involved. All the presentations and discussions made clear how fundamentally experiences and forms of exile, flight and persecution are interconnected with the past and present of different social, historical and biographical contexts. In view of the complex facets and dimensions of these issues, sociological theory building is here still in its infancy. But taken together,

the presentations and discussions can be seen as a clear argument in favour of a sociohistorically oriented, interpretive and power-sensitive research approach, that takes into account the experiences of the individuals and collectivities concerned. This includes a comparative approach to different epochs and regions.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Biographies in the making in a connected lifeworld. Exploring visual and verbal constructions of life stories

(<https://visbio.univie.ac.at/en/>)

Elisabeth Mayer and Roswitha Breckner

Principal investigator: Prof. Dr. Roswitha Breckner (University of Vienna)

Researchers: Dr. Johannes Marent (Post-Doc), Elisabeth Mayer (Pre-Doc and PhD-candidate) (both University of Vienna)

Research assistants: Anna Weisser, BA (University of Vienna)

Funded by the [Austrian Science Fund \(FWF\)](#)

Duration of the project: March 2020 - February 2023

This project is a follow-up from a previous one on “Visual biographies in a connected lifeworld” that took place from October 2017 until March 2019 and was funded by the Anniversary Fund of the City of Vienna for the Austrian Academy of Science (OEAW). The former team consisted of Roswitha Breckner (PI), Maria Schreiber (Post-Doc), Elisabeth Mayer (Pre-Doc) and Anna Weisser (student assistant). In this project we focused on eliciting visual and narrated biographies from 30-40-years old users of Facebook and Instagram and developed a complex methodological approach that is consequently used in the present project.

Objectives and research questions

Everyday communication has undergone a shift to the digital realm and especially to Social Media, where the use of images plays an important role. Photos are uploaded, albums and profiles curated and everyday moments as well as exceptional ones are documented and shared with others. This raises the question if and how also biographies are formed and transformed through digitalized visual communication. It is not yet clear to what extent new visual forms of communication on Social Media are accompanied by shifts in biographical construction processes since the online and offline worlds remain closely connected and do not form separate spheres. Therefore, research on biographical construction processes in Social Media requires a reconstruction of both online and offline biographical articulation through images as well as in oral and written narratives.

Against this background, the project is based on the general question of whether the ways of constructing biographies are changing due to new media practices and arenas such as Facebook and Instagram. More specifically, the following questions are guiding our research: In what ways do biographies emerge on Social Media especially with regard to image compilations? Do patterns of pictorial biographical construction prevalent since the 19th century, e.g. in (family) photo albums, extend onto Social Media? To what extent are new forms of biographical construction emerging? How is the biographical construction through images linked to narrative construction processes? How can these connections be investigated with interpretative methods? How do visual and narrative biographical constructions of members of different media generations differ?

Methodological approach as triangulation of visual and narrative analysis

We apply an interpretative-reconstructive approach with an innovative combination of narrative and visual methodologies of data collection and analysis. Social Media self-presentations are mainly elicited from Facebook and Instagram that are made available by our research participants. Subsequently, we conduct extensive narrative biographical interviews (Schütze 2008; Rosenthal 2018). During these we gather collections of analogue photos and finally conduct an interview dedicated primarily to the images that became relevant in the biographical presentations and the history of media practices of our participants. These data are complemented by brief ethnographic field notes from the interviewers as well as by observations concerning the online and offline media usage.

Based on the logic of theoretical sampling, in-depth case reconstructions are carried out. Each data type is first analyzed separately using visual methods such as Image Cluster Analysis (Müller 2016), Figurative Hermeneutics (Müller 2012) and Visual Segment Analysis (Breckner 2010) as well as Biographical Case Reconstruction (Rosenthal 2018) for the narrative interviews. Subsequently, the topics, patterns and styles of biographical self-presentation in each medium are compared looking both at structural differences and similarities. Finally, the reconstructed cases are systematically compared with the aim of creating a typology of how the visual-biographical construction processes in Social Media are related to the analogous image biographies as well as to the overall biographical construction (Schütze 2008) in the narrative interviews. This in turn will be the basis for theoretical concepts for the construction of biographies in different media.

In the previous project we first asked 30-40-year-old users of Facebook to participate in our study, as this is the generation that experienced the introduction of the internet in their (late) teenage years and the advent of Social Media and smartphones in their 20s. Thus, they are still familiar with analogue photography as well as with the appearances of different media platforms. In this way they represent the generation that has implemented the media change in their biography. With a total of 15 interview partners in Austria, we were able to gather about 53 hours of interview material and more than 15.775 photos. Four additional interviews were made possible by the cooperation with Hermilio Santos and his team at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS, Brazil).

In order to grasp potential differences and changes in constructing biographies in relation to Social Media, in the present project we will compare three different media generations with different intensities of usage and familiarity with digital media: 14-20 year-olds, 30-40 year-olds and those aged 60 plus. In addition, we will include comparative cases of research partners from Brazil and Greece in order to be able to approximately assess both societal characteristics and the globalizing effect of these media with regard to the construction of biographies.

First Findings

Findings from previous media analyses already show that the posting of photos in Social Media serves both the momentary sharing of experiences without the intention of further memorization and - especially in photo compilations on different devices - the thematic formation of connections between events and experiences over a longer period of time. This has also been confirmed in our study. The survival of traditional forms of using photographs in Social Media in connection with biographical construction processes can also be observed, as can the emergence of new phenomena such as gaff photography and its biographical references (Breckner 2018).

Accordingly, the biographical significance of publishing photos in Social Media can vary. It ranges from exchanging visual impressions of immediate experiences; to showing oneself as a member of a particular group or to identify with a larger community; to reassure oneself ("that's me"); to the development of an individual visual style as an essential element of one's own biography.

With the first results of 15 case analyses in the group of 30-40 year-olds, some more structural observations are emerging. It is becoming increasingly clear how strongly the specific composition of photos, especially in Facebook photo albums, fulfils biographical functions and is embedded in the overall biography. Both the thematic focuses of the albums and the style of the respective compilation are linked to experiential contexts of the life history that can be reconstructed also in connection with the narrative interviews. It also becomes clear to what extent photo compilations on Social Media offer different possibilities to actively and creatively shape one's own biography. This applies, for example, to showing contexts of experience and turning points that are no longer relevant at the time of the interview, thus literally making very different biographical phases and their respective functions visible. But it also concerns the possibility of leaving biographical orientations that are difficult to reconcile or conflicting to stand in a kind of parallel montage next to each other. And finally, it concerns the possibility of creating a counter-horizon to stressful or even traumatic biographical experiences with "beautiful pictures" of nature or animals, for example. These observations might also lead to a first typology in the further course of the project.

At present, the COVID-pandemic has a major impact on our project. Face-to-face interviews, which in our case should ideally take place at our interview partner's homes, are not yet possible. The original plan to start collecting data from teenagers therefore had to be changed. We hope to continue with our data collection in autumn 2020. In the meantime, we are concentrating on case-analyses and cross-case comparison. We are hopeful to be able to present new findings at the ISA Forum conference in Porto Alegre at the latest.

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Heiresses – Biographical Narratives of Three Generations of Black Women in Brazil (Research and Documentary Film)

Coordination: Hermílio Santos

Research Assistant: Marciele Madruga Machado

Financial Support: FAPERGS (Edital PUCRS-FAPERGS)

This research and documentary film project recently approved for the financial support by FAPERGS (State agency of research support of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil). The different cycles of colonization of the Brazilian territory by the Portuguese colonial power were marked by three main products: sugar cane, especially in the region of Recife and Olinda, in the northeast state of Pernambuco; the gold and diamond exploration in the region of Ouro Preto and Diamantina, in the state of Minas Gerais; and the production of jerky (salty meat) in the extreme South of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in the region of Pelotas, close to the border of Uruguay. All these economic cycles adopted slaved workforce. Paradoxically, in Brazil, differently from historians, the contemporary sociological research only marginally investigates this heritage as a way to understand the reality of the contemporary social context of the country. The research and the documentary film will be mostly based in biographical narrative interviews, aiming to capture the experiences of these women during a relatively large time-lapse. "Heiresses" aims to discuss the theme of slavery heritage from an unusual perspective, both in audio-visual production and in sociological research. This important topic has frequently been represented as if there were no real characters involved. In other words, the "institute of slavery", when discussed, does not identify the characters involved in the phenomenon. Sure, the protagonists are no longer alive, but what about their heirs and heiresses? How do they live and what personal experiences do people whose ancestors have been subjugated to this type of abusive relationship have? How is this historical past still present in the daily lives of these people? How is the legacy of slavery present in the biographies of people over the generations? What changes can be seen in women's experiences from one generation to another? The research and the documentary film will try to present these and other related social problems in order to provoke new insights and build bridges beyond the faceless commonly disseminated representation of people who were subjected to enslavement during a long historical period in Brazil. The documentary film, that should be presented in three episodes, wants to change this impersonal perspective to the issue, that reinforces, in some way, the taboo around one of the most relevant historical experiences to understand the country in its nuances and social contradictions.

NEW RESEARCH CENTER

“Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability” (GCSMUS)

Nina Baur and Angela Million (GCSMUS Speakers)

Since 01.01.2020, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is funding the “**Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability**” (**GCSMUS**) via the DAAD program “Higher Education Excellence in Development Cooperation – exceed”. GCSMUS is based at Technische Universität Berlin (Germany) and connects 48 institutional partners from 48 countries and 8 world regions.

The center aims at developing **transdisciplinary spatial methods** in order to improve both the academic education in the spatial disciplines and planning practice via evidence-based and low-impact urban development (LIUD). The center will enable scholars to get in contact with methodologists from various disciplines all over the world and to deepen discussions with researchers from various methodological angles. Amongst others, we want to discuss issues such as spatial methods, cross-cultural methods and issues of comparability, decolonizing social science methodology, methods for the Global South, methodological issues relevant for specific world regions (e.g. Africa, America, Asia, Europe), applied research methods on urban design, urban planning, traffic planning and environmental planning, arts- and design-based methods, interdisciplinary and collaborative research methods, methods for values research, global wellbeing and sustainability, big data and cross-disciplinary research.

In order to achieve these goals, the center is organized as a **peer-learning process** and will implement several strategic Actions between 2020 and 2024. While some of the center's activities are for GCSMUS-member-institutions only, **many activities** such as international conferences, workshops as well as other events and funding opportunities are **open also to non-members**.

If you are interested in being informed about these activities or the center's activities in general, please kindly **subscribe to our newsletter** by registering via the following website: <https://lists.tu-berlin.de/mailman/listinfo/mes-smusnews>

More information on the center can be found on: www.mes.tu-berlin.de/GCSMUS

If you have any other inquiries on the center, please kindly contact the GCSMUS Office by sending an email to: smus@mes.tu-berlin.de

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PUBLICATIONS

Göttingen Series in Sociological Biographical Research Göttinger Beiträge zur soziologischen Biographieforschung

*Editors: Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Gabriele Rosenthal, Nicole Witte,
Arne Worm*

In recent years, methods in biographical research that are anchored in social constructivism and the sociology of knowledge have become established in the Center of Methods in Social Sciences at Georg-August University, Göttingen. In this context, a large amount of innovative and empirically sound research on a great variety of topics has been carried out. This new series is intended to do justice to this development. The editors wish to offer a forum for studies in the field of sociology written in German or English, whether doctoral dissertations, research reports or scholarly articles, which are based on the methodologies developed at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences. The studies published in the series shall include researchworks focused on methods and methodological developments as well as on material topics.

All contributions will be subject to a double-blind peer-review process.

Already published:

Arne Worm (2019). Fluchtmigration aus Syrien. Eine biographietheoretische und figurationssoziologische Studie. Göttinger Beiträge zur soziologischen Biographieforschung 1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17875/gup2019-1228>

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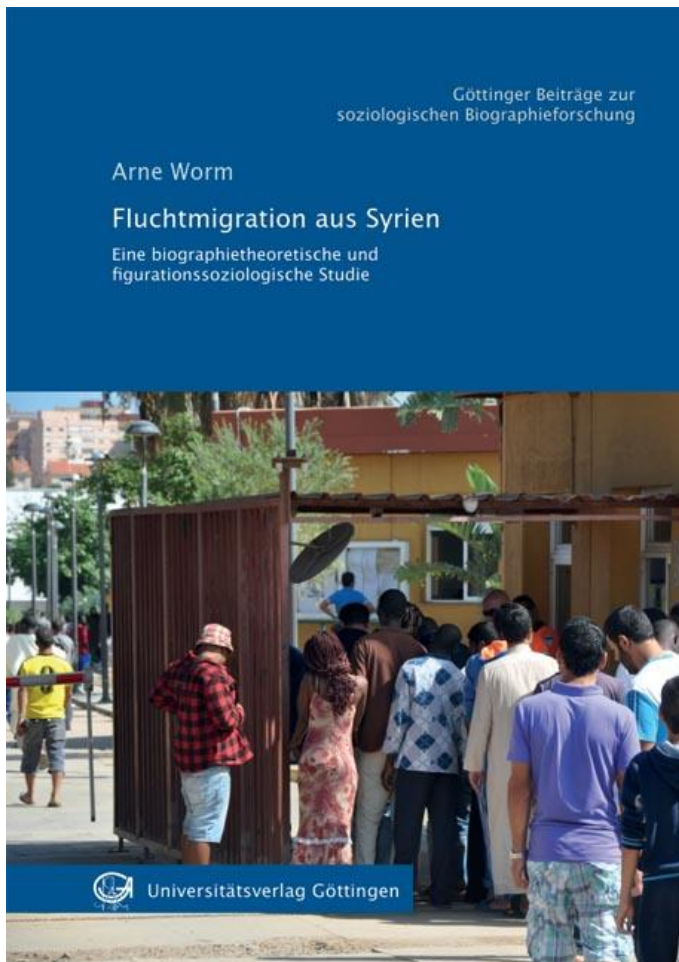
Hendrik Hinrichsen: Die Generation Oslo im Westjordanland. Historische Generationen in prozesssoziologischer Perspektive

Eva Bahl and Johannes Becker (eds). Global processes of flight and migration: The explanatory power of case studies.

Fluchtmigration aus Syrien. Eine biographietheoretische und figurationssoziologische Studie

[Refugee migration from Syria. A biographical and figurational study]

Arne Worm



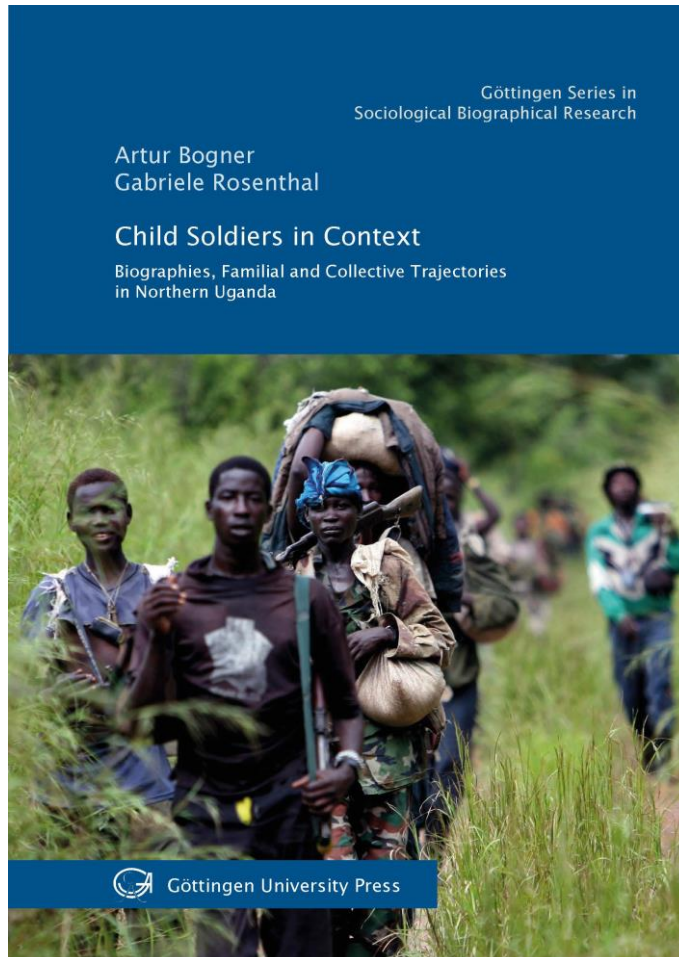
Der bewaffnete Konflikt in Syrien seit dem Frühjahr 2011 hat in quantitativer Hinsicht eine der größten gewalt- und konfliktbedingten Fluchtbewegungen seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg hervorgerufen. Die im Kontext des vielschichtigen, in seinem Verlauf zunehmend extrem gewalttätigen syrischen Bürgerkrieges flüchtenden Menschen, insgesamt etwa die Hälfte der syrischen Gesamtbevölkerung, suchten und suchen überwiegend innerhalb anderer Regionen Syriens oder in den unmittelbar angrenzenden Ländern Schutz, Sicherheit und soziale Teilhabe. Nur verhältnismäßig wenige von ihnen flüchteten in geographisch relativ weit entfernte Staaten (zum Beispiel in die „Europäische Union“) beziehungsweise hatten die Möglichkeit und die Ressourcen, sich auf

diesen Weg zu machen. Die vorliegende soziologische Studie behandelt mit den Fluchtmigrationen und Fluchterfahrungen von Menschen aus Syrien, die vor dem Hintergrund des gewaltsamen Konfliktes zwischen 2014 und 2017 über den spanisch-marokkanischen Grenzraum um die Enklaven Ceuta und Melilla migriert waren, einen Ausschnitt dieses Migrationsgeschehens. Anhand einer Kombination von biographietheoretischen, figurationssoziologischen und zugehörigkeitstheoretischen Perspektiven erfolgt eine empirische Untersuchung zu den Fluchtverläufen, Lebenssituationen und Selbstpräsentationen von Geflüchteten aus Syrien im spanisch-marokkanischen Grenzraum um die Enklaven Ceuta und Melilla. Auf dieser empirischen Basis wird der Vorschlag diskutiert, Fluchtmigrationen soziologisch als Migrationsverläufe zu fassen, die sich im Kontext von gewaltverursachten und -verursachenden Prozessen gesellschaftlicher Ordnungsbildung und Transformation herausbilden und deren Gesamtverläufe integral mit diesen Prozessen verwoben sind.

Open access: <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2019-1228>

Child Soldiers in context. Biographies, familial and collective trajectories in Northern Uganda

Artur Bogner, Gabriele Rosenthal



Long before “IS” and “Boko Haram”, the messianic “Lord’s Resistance Army” (LRA) in Uganda was considered as one of the most brutal rebel groups in Africa, or in the world, and as one which clearly specialized in the abduction, “recruitment” and deployment of children and adolescents as combatants. This book presents the results of a research project on former child soldiers and rebels in northern Uganda and their “reintegration” into society after their return to civilian life. The authors investigate their biographies and the social figurations or relationships between them and members of the civilian population that emerged following their return, not least in their families of origin, and show which conditions facilitate or hinder their “(re)integration” into

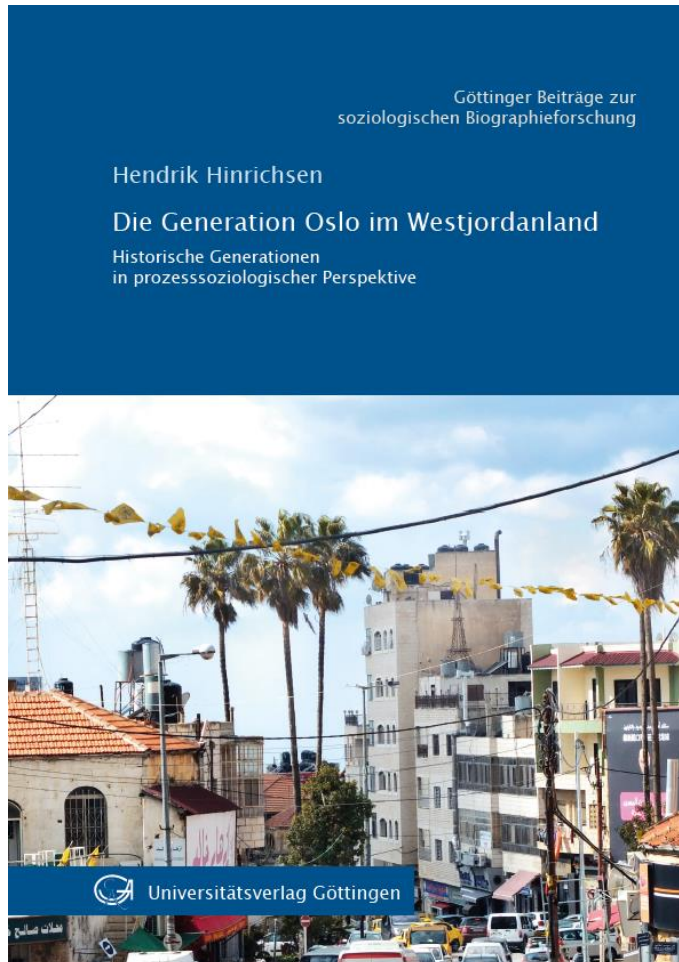
civilian life. The discussion also shows what distinguishes them from former members of rebel groups in the neighboring region of West Nile, in respect of their history and how they were recruited, as well as in their present situation and social position.

Open access: <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2020-1325>

Die Generation Oslo im Westjordanland. Historische Generationen in prozesssoziologischer Perspektive

[The Generation Oslo in the West Bank. Historical generations in a process-sociological perspective]

Hendrik Hinrichsen



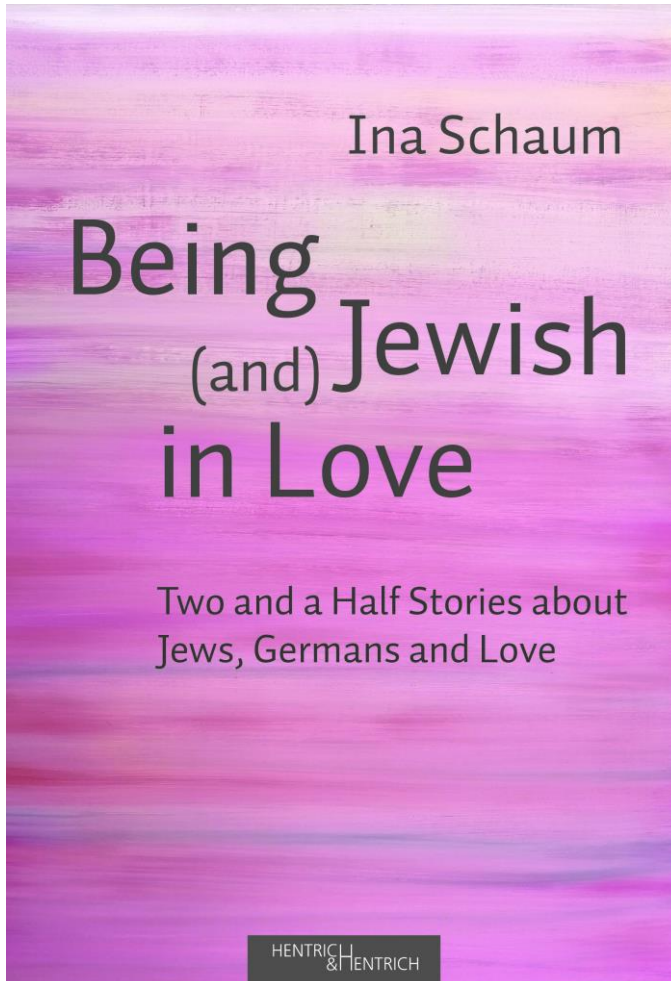
The past fifty years have seen far-reaching changes in Palestinian society in the West Bank. The Israeli occupation which began in 1967, the political mobilization of the 1970s and 1980s, and the so-called peace process in the 1990s went together with deep social transformations, which not only changed the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also altered the figurations and conflict lines between different social groups within Palestinian society. This book is a sociological study of these transformation processes, based on a combination of Norbert Elias' figural sociology, social-constructivist biographical research, and Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and generational sociology.

In addition to conflicts and tensions between inhabitants of the

old refugee camps and the (new) urban middle class in the West Bank, the author focuses in particular on a latent Palestinian generational conflict: it is clear that members of the 'Oslo Generation' – meaning those who grew up during the Oslo peace process in the 1990s – have fewer power and life chances, and in particular fewer opportunities for meaning, than their predecessors in the generation of fighters and activists of the 1970s and 1980s.

Being Jewish (and) in love: Two and a half stories about Jews, Germans and love

Ina Schaum



What does it mean to be in search of love as a young Jewish adult in Germany? How are closeness and distance experienced, negotiated and shaped in romantic encounters? In which contexts could it matter if the other person is Jewish? In the book, the author discusses these questions with the help of two stories of young Jewish adults. Based on biographical interviews, the author gives an insight into the complexity of the social, emotional and biographical dimensions that are negotiated with the desire for a love relationship. Interwoven with this, the author uses autoethnographic fragments to reflect her own history and positioning as non-Jewish majority German and the ethical questions that arise for her research and writing.

“Her interviews and analyses are in a rare way empathic and self-exposing, sensitive and knowledgeable at the same time. [...] The book not only evokes the present age of the interviewees, but of us readers, too, and in a very specific way of the author’s own generation. It does so in a highly inspiring way, offering an echo sounder for ‘feeling rules’ and emotional manifestations in a still complex web of relationships between ‘Germans’ and ‘Jews’!” Eva Lezzi

More information can be found here: <https://www.hentrichhentrich.de/buch-being-jewish-and-in-love.html>

Ott, akkor - túléléstörténetek a soából

[There, then... Survival Stories From the Shoah]

Júlia Vajda

Will be published in fall 2020



Mindfulness and the 'psychological imagination'

Daniel Nehring and Ashley Frawley

We analyse the rise of 'mindfulness' in English language media discourses and contextualise it in terms of its expression of a persistent underlying 'psychological imagination' in contemporary thinking about social problems. An inversion of C. Wright Mills' much-cited sociological imagination, the psychological imagination draws on medical-scientific authority to treat social problems as private concerns rooted in individual biology, mentality and behaviour. We analyse the roles which academic claims-making, commercial interests and mass mediatisation have played in the rise of mindfulness from the late 1970s onwards. We first map the translation of mindfulness from Buddhist philosophy into Western psychotherapy and popular psychology before considering its emergence and expression in the public sphere of news media claims-making. We argue that where the sociological imagination 'promised' above all the treatment of private troubles as public issues and insights into the 'human variety' produced by myriad ways of living, the psychological imagination promises the isolation of public issues as private concerns rooted in individual biology, mentality and behaviour. The psychological imagination permeates the expression of mindfulness as a solution to social ills and symbolises the comparative decline of assumptions implicit in Mills' 20th century rousing call to social scientists.

Sociology of Health and Illness 42(5), 1184-1201.

Open access at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-9566.13093>

Past Neighbourhoods: Palestinians and Jerusalem's 'enlarged Jewish Quarter'.

Johannes Becker

In: Nazan Maksudyan/Hilal Alkan (eds.), *Urban neighbourhood formations: Boundaries, narrations and intimacies*. London: Routledge, 99-118.

After the Israeli conquest of East Jerusalem in 1967, a process started in which several Palestinian Old City neighbourhoods were placed in the past and an administratively defined and ethno-religiously exclusive 'enlarged Jewish Quarter' was established. This process included not only the eviction of the neighbourhoods' vast majority of residents, but also a marginalisation on two levels: both the spatial and social restriction of everyday life for those Palestinians who remained in this area (spatial marginalisation) and the fading individual memory and lacking basis for collective memory of those neighbourhoods (temporal marginalisation). Based on biographical case reconstructions of a Palestinian man who was evicted and a woman whose family remained, I show that Israeli policies are driving this process of marginalisation, though it is also connected to inter-Palestinian established-outsider relations. Conceptually, I discuss the relations between biography and place, first, as biographical processes of emplacement, and second, as memories of place within self-presentations in interviews.

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