

History of Knowledge

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Blogging Migrant Knowledge – Part I

January 31, 2022 ~ Mark R. Stoneman

A lot of interesting material has been published over at *Migrant Knowledge* since its inception nearly three years ago. If the material could just as easily have found a home here, it was produced for our sister website as part of a specific research program linked to a broad network of scholars, on the one hand, and related research activities coordinated by the [GHI's Pacific Regional Office](#), on the other. The site's conceptualization is different from ours, but its contributions deserve to be read by all who are interested in histories of knowledge. Indeed, we have occasionally crossposted on both blogs in order to point out this overlap.

The editorial processes of *Migrant Knowledge* are similar to ours, in part because I am on both teams. On the other hand, the different *raison d'être* of *Migrant Knowledge* means that the taxonomies for organizing its contents came about in a different way than has been occurring here at *History of Knowledge*. Instead of following a principle of emergent structure, Andrea Westermann and Swen Steinberg developed fifteen “perspectives” around which to organize both the blog and the research interests of the network's members. These perspectives are visible on individual network member pages and blog posts as well as in the pull-down menus on the main network and blog pages. Of course, the same blog posts could be organized in other ways too.



To learn more about the conceptualization of this blog, *History of Knowledge*, see “[Blogging Histories of Knowledge in Washington, D.C.](#)” by Mark Stoneman and Kerstin von der Krone, “[Digital History](#),” ed. Simone Lässig, special issue, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 47, no. 1 (2021): 163–74. [🔗](#)

A particularly rich and dynamic group of studies centers around young migrants (one of the site's “perspectives”) and the historiographical problem of their agency. Bettina Hitzer and Friederike Kind-Kovács explain the stakes in a [recent crosspost](#) from a related project, *In Search of the Migrant Child*. *Migrant Knowledge* has also published a five-part series on youth, migration, and knowledge-transfer titled [Go-Betweens](#). Besides a conceptual introduction by Simone Lässig, there are H. Glenn Penny's ruminations on understanding the particular educational problem of “growing up German in Chile” in the first half of the twentieth century, and Elisabeth Engel approaches the agency of children in missionary schools by considering the pupils' motivations and changing social standing. Finally, Swen Steinberg uses a 1942 children's novel by Babette Deutsch, *The Welcome*, to illustrate the insights that can be gleaned from looking at the experiences of immigrant children who had fled persecution in Europe.



Go-Betweens

A Miniseries at *Migrant Knowledge* on Youth, Migration, and Knowledge Transfer

With contributions by [Simone Lässig](#), [H. Glenn Penny](#), [Elisabeth Engel](#), [Brian Van Wyck](#), and [Swen Steinberg](#)

Outside the *Go-Betweens* series, Susanne Quitmann writes about “[Knowledge Sharing among British Child Migrants in Canada, 1869–1950](#),” and Kimberly Cheng introduces us to “[The Power of Play](#)” for “[Jewish Refugee Children in World War II Shanghai](#).” Additionally, Wendy L. Rouse uses children's testimony to migration officials to consider [the role Chinese children played](#) in navigating migration to the United States in the face of that country's exclusionary policies. Her piece also offers tantalizing remarks about the role of intergenerational story-telling in knowledge production and transmission. Turning to young migrant women in contemporary Berlin, Mervete Bobaj and Anh-Susann Pham Thi discuss their efforts to help “girls” tell their stories in film in a [community-based project called M-Power](#) (pronounced “empower”, the M standing for *Mädchen* or girl):

“Especially for young migrants who have yet to discover their own biographies or rewrite their traumas of migration, knowledge is not only power but a means of empowerment.”

Returning to *Go-Betweens*, if Swen Steinberg helps us interrogate children's agency, he relies on the indirect testimony of an expert witness whose friendship and conversations informed Deutsch's novel. Also present in the other contributions to the series, expertise takes center stage in Bryan Van Wyck's piece on the so-called [Qur'an school problem](#) in West Germany in the 1970s and 80s.

“A focus on knowledge attuned me to the Turkish actors who provided West Germans with the ostensibly reliable information about Qur'an schools that informed their prejudices and perceptions, highlighting the often-neglected role of Turkish “migrant experts.”

The question of socially, culturally, and politically recognized expertise has been at the center of our ongoing [public uncertainty](#) about the pandemic and appropriate public health measures. It is also relevant, as Van Wyck shows, for interrogating expertise about other countries and cultures. The problem of expertise, academic and bureaucratic knowledge included, is raised in many other posts as well. More on that forthcoming in Part II.

Mark Stoneman is an independent editor and historian based in Washington, DC. He is a coeditor and cofounder of the [History of Knowledge](#) and [Migrant Knowledge](#) blogs.

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