

Call for Papers

Family Archives in / of Global Transit

Knowledge, Memory and the Ambiguity between Private and Public

International Workshop

May 27-28, 2027

Technische Universität Braunschweig

Conveners: Technische Universität Braunschweig and the Leo Baeck Institute - New York / Berlin

Organizers: Simone Lässig, Julian zur Lage (both Institut für Geschichtswissenschaft, Technische Universität Braunschweig), Frank Mecklenburg (Leo Baeck Institute - New York / Berlin), Jennifer Rodgers (Centre Interdisciplinaire d'études et de Recherches sur l'Allemagne, Paris) and Swen Steinberg (Department of History and School of Religion, Queen's University Kingston, Ontario)

During the age of the nation-state, forced migration has emerged as a universal phenomenon with disruptive consequences, particularly during the 19th century and subsequent 'century of refugees': it has upended professional trajectories and wrested people from their social realities, in most cases forcing them to endure uncertain conditions during their transit. Often separated from their relatives, refugees and displaced- and stateless persons often lingered for weeks, months, years and, in some cases, even decades in temporary refugee housing arrangements, which included internment camps, hotels, shelters, and transit dwellings. By way of myriad routes and transit infrastructures, they ultimately arrived in the places they wished and/ or were permitted to stay in the long(er) term.

The spatial dimensions of transit were as vagarious as its temporal circumstances: through securing transit visas or— drawing on the British colonial example— being deported unwillingly and with no freedom of choice, people found planned and contingent paths to the countries they classified as secure. These ever-changing

realities and phases of transit necessarily produced an impressive breadth of empirical knowledge, including about unfamiliar cultural and socioeconomic spaces and colonial and other structures of power and violence. In turn, they upended conceptions of ancestry, identity, and belonging, as well as established notions of family and kinship.

The multifaceted reconceptualization of traditional familial frameworks sparked by emigration, flight, and the different phases of transit remains largely unexplored within historical research. In particular, there is a significant lacuna about the body of sources that families or individuals took with them into the unknown or those produced and conserved in the transit locales. In addition, many of the artefacts, as the material representations of 'life in transit,' that archivists, curators, and historians (want to) use as primary sources, have themselves repeatedly migrated.

This workshop places as its central focus on those archives most commonly preserved and bequeathed (with)in families and probes their meanings from different perspectives: What knowledge can be gleaned from family archives about the everyday lives of refugees and displaced- and stateless persons in transit? What collections developed specifically as a result or only because of specific experiences in and of transit? What role did and do private archives play in the maintenance and stabilization of familial structures during and after phases of transit and to what extent did distinct elements of belonging such as class, gender, religion, and age rupture them? What are the ways in which the collection and preservation of documents, objects, images, and other artefacts helped sustain the memory of former lives, make transit bearable, process trauma, and forge new identities? The workshop addresses these and other related questions, but further considers the methodological challenges faced by researchers who work with such transitory and generated archives. The focal point of the workshop is the complex and tense intersections—and interstitialities—of public and private collections of social memory. It examines the often difficult and tenuous legal bases on which the preservation, use, and documentation of such sources lie, as well as the moral and ethical dimensions of conducting research within public collections and private archives of refugees and displaced- and stateless persons.

We invite scholars, archivists, representatives from other public and private collections and museums, and practitioners of public history—including producers and authors of history podcasts and publications—to discuss this complex nexus of questions and challenges. Along with the phases and vestiges of transit from persons who fled National Socialism, the workshop will examine and discuss examples of family archives from various global contexts during the 19th and 20th century.

The workshop will be held in English. Individual presentations are limited to 20 minutes and the associated papers will be pre-circulated before the workshop. We also welcome proposals for panels of up to three papers. Proposals must include a title, an abstract of no more than 300 words, a short one-page CV that includes relevant publications, and participants' contact information (address, phone, email) and be submitted online (<https://limesurvey.rz.tu-bs.de/265692>) as one PDF by July 31, 2026. Applicants will be informed about the acceptance of their paper in October 2026. Accommodations will be arranged and paid for by the workshop organizers.

Participants must make their own travel arrangements. Funding subsidies for travel may be available upon request, especially for participants who might not otherwise have the means to attend the workshop, such as early-career scholars and those individuals from institutions with limited resources. Please inform us if you can utilize funds from your home institution to participate in the workshop. There is no registration fee.

This workshop is part of the ongoing initiative “In Global Transit: International Standing Working Group to Explore Spatial and Temporal Dimensions in Global Migration [1], facilitated by Technische Universität Braunschweig (and formerly the German Historical Institute Washington, DC). It continues a series of related workshops and conferences, including “Archives in/of Transit: Historical Perspectives from the 1930s to the Present” (Los Angeles, 2024, [2]) and “Refugees in Global Transit: Encounters, Knowledge, and Coping Strategies in a Disrupted World, 1930s–1950s” (Mumbai, 2025 [3]). The working group also organizes the “In Global Transit” platform and blog, where participants of the Family Archives in/ of Transit

workshop will have the opportunity to publish their research either immediately before or concurrently to the workshop.

[1] Website: <https://transit.hypotheses.org/>

[2] Workshop report: https://www.ghi-dc.org/fileadmin/publications/Bulletin/bu74/GHI-74_11REPArchivesinTransit_4pp_194-200.pdf

[3] Conference report: https://www.ghi-dc.org/fileadmin/publications/Bulletin/bu76/GHI-76_07REPGlobalTransit_Mumbai_3pp_121-128.pdf