A Cultural Technique? (Big) Data and the Making of Migration

Veranstalter: Institut für Migrationsfor-schung und Interkulturelle Studien (IMIS), Universität Osnabrück
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Since the nineteenth century, collecting and analyzing large amounts of data became one of the key techniques of state rule and administration. This was especially true with regard to data about individuals, thereby making not only the population as a whole but also its individual members „readable". While criminal surveillance was and is an important field of usage for person-related data, migration also quickly became an object of interest for official data collectors. Belgium, for instance, has been continuously gathering data on „foreigners" since the nineteenth century. Today, ideas about controlling and forecasting migration with the help of „big data" enjoy great popularity with national and international agencies of migration management. Historically, person-related data has also been used to direct migratory movements, for instance in the case of large-scale registration and resettlement of „ethnic Germans" in Eastern Europe by Nazi German agencies.

This workshop brought together scholars from different disciplines – history, social and political sciences – as well as archivists who are working on issues of migration and (big) data in different contexts and different times. Its purpose was to bring into dialogue usually rather disconnected fields of inquiry and explore common themes across disciplinary divides. The underlying assumption was that the „making of migration" can be interpreted as the application of a „cultural technique" of representing, replicating and shaping reality by means of (big) data.

The program of the workshop was organized along several key themes touching multiple disciplines. The panels of the morning session were dedicated to three distinct issues: the production of data, the tracing of data subjects, and the translation of data into different contexts and for different purposes. The afternoon session had another two panels focused on the agents of data production and data analysis.

Historian SEBASTIAN BONDZIO (Osnabrück) opened the first panel, entitled „Producing Data", with a presentation on the mining of historical card file indexes as serial sources. His current research deals with the Gestapo card index, a massive database that the Nazi secret police used for the persecution of political opponents and for the creation of a persistent myth of omniscience and omnipotence. He identified three ways of getting knowledge out of historical card files: by reconstructing individual biographies contained therein, by analyzing the collective social profile of those registered, and by looking at the institutional practices and structures of the data-producing institution and hence the process of knowledge production itself.

Archivist INES MÜLLER (Berlin) talked about a particular historical case of data production, the organization of card file indexes of „Germans abroad" by the *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* (DAI), an institution created in 1917 to research and connect with „ethnic Germans" beyond the borders of the German state. From the very beginning, the institute gathered data on „Germandom" around the globe, aggregating it in different indexes, including the *Zentralkartei der Deutschen im Ausland* (central index of Germans abroad) and the *Bestandskartei der Russlanddeutschen* (inventory of Russian Germans). While the former focused on people alive, the latter also included extensive data on the ancestry of ethnic Germans in Russia. All this information obtained relevance for the German policies of occupation and resettlement of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe after 1939.

Knowledge production was also at the heart of the presentation by political scientist LAURA STIELIKE (Osnabrück), who is currently developing a research project on the production of migration knowledge in the context of big data. Stressing big data's aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy – a myth about data in general that was discussed throughout

the workshop – she explored the recent big data hype among international organisations working in the field of migration. The promise of big data for migration governance is to access very large data sets on migration which are virtually real-time and cover areas with no or limited migration statistics. This promise is based on the disputable assumption that the more accurate knowledge policy makers have on migration, the better they can manage it. Existing big data projects on migration are characterised by a specific constellation of political, technological and economic actors each carrying sector-related assumptions, categories and values into migration knowledge which is then translated into so-called evidence-based policy. In her future research project, Stielike will therefore focus on the production of migration knowledge at the interface between policy makers, data analysts and data providing companies. The following discussion carved out the continuities and ruptures in data and knowledge production on migration and controversially engaged with the question whether there really is something substantially new about the contemporary production of big data.

On the second panel, „Tracing Data Subjects", VASSILIS TSIANOS (Kiel) talked about issues of „interoperability" of the European dactyloscopic database Eurodac, the original purpose of which is to prevent multiple asylum applications by registering the fingerprints of asylum seekers. Reconstructing the case of Hussein K., an Afghan asylum seeker who was imprisoned for rape in Greece, managed to move to Germany after his release and then raped and murdered a young woman in Freiburg, Vassilis Tsianos argued that due to the non-interoperability of Eurodac with national and international criminal data bases, Hussein K. could not have been stopped preemptively. He then analyzed current projects of linking up Eurodac with other data bases and of opening it for Europol and Interpol, but stressed at the same time that a higher linkability of data bases would only be possible at the price of disregarding the protection of data privacy.

HENNING BORGGRÄFE, CHRISTIAN HÖSCHLER and CHRISTIANE WEBER (all Bad Arolsen) talked about a very different kind of tracing, and namely the tracing of individual fates of wartime displaced persons (DP) based on the documentation contained in the personal card indexes of the International Tracing Service (ITS). The over two million DP's registration cards which have meanwhile been digitalized give interesting insights into practices of self-categorisation as they were filled in by DPs themselves, who chose, for example, to indicate several ethnic affiliations or to provide information strategically in order to benefit from specific DP welfare schemes. The presentation also touched upon the question of interoperability, as in the 1960s and 1970s both the US secret service and German government agencies tried to access the data for completely different reasons than for what they had originally been collected. The following discussion focused on the larger issue of data protection versus interoperability of data bases as well as on the changing uses of data bases from tracing instruments to historical archives.

The contributions to the third panel, „Translating Data", then discussed the shifting uses of data in different contexts. Taking up the thematic thread opened by Ines Müller before, JANNIS PANAGIOTIDIS (Osnabrück) talked about the long life of data gathered on ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union during the interwar period and the Second World War. The population of occupied Ukraine was screened on several occasions after 1941 to seek out and register ethnic Germans, who were to become privileged settlers of the Greater German Empire. Towards the end of the war, these Germans were resettled to occupied Poland, where more registration took place. All the data produced during these registration campaigns then fulfilled different functions during the postwar period, shaping the migration opportunities of ethnic Germans remaining in the Soviet Union, whose claims to „Germandom" would be assessed by German authorities based on wartime data – while producing new data in the process.

FRAN MEISSNER (Delft) then presented a joint project with LINNET TAYLOR (Tilburg). Against the backdrop of the recent „migration crisis"-discourse, the project observes a growing marketization of migration data. In

this context, migration is translated from a socio-political challenge into a problem of information. New private actors such as big data analysts and intelligence firms are actively involved in creating this market opportunity to sell their services in migration „now casting". The connectivity between mobile phone, satellite, social media and intelligence data holds the promise of the most up-to-date and detailed data on migration. At the same time, the datafication of migration creates a black box hiding the highly political questions at stake. The following discussion picked up the issue of speed in data production, analysis and translation and compared historical and contemporary processes of blackboxing.

In the first afternoon session on the construction of the „self" and the „other" by agents of data production, HANS-CHRISTIAN PETERSEN (Oldenburg) introduced a key actor of data production on Russian Germans: Karl Stumpp. Stumpp, being native of a small village near Odessa and post-revolution émigré to Germany, was the mastermind behind the „inventory of Russian Germans" of the DAI. His data collecting activities were motivated both by personal interest and a pronounced *völkisch* agenda. He benefitted from the SS apparatus and from the *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern territories), headed by Alfred Rosenberg, which allowed him to collect further data in Bessarabia and in occupied Ukraine, all of which later became part of Stumpp's genealogical opus. Stumpp's activities were key for the construction of a Russian-German self-identity, which was based on a narrative of genealogical descent from the German lands and having been a *Volk auf dem Weg* (people on the move) since the eighteenth century.

While Petersen's presentation dealt with collective constructions of the self aimed at inclusion into a national community, exclusive constructions of the „other" were the object of the presentation by SIMON SPERLING (Osnabrück). In his dissertation project, he examines the concept of *Bleibeperspektive* (prospect to stay) as a tool of excluding unwanted immigrants. The prognosis of a likelihood to stay depends, among other things, on collec-

ted data on the „protection rate" of applicants for asylum from particular countries. Sperling identified this logic as self-referential, since it bases decisions on the chances of individual recognition on past decisions on the same issue by the same institutions. Despite that, the data-based logic of this process provides it with an air of objectivity.

The second afternoon panel on „Agents of Data Analysis: Using, Abusing and Reusing Data" tied in with the morning panel on translating data. The focus was set on agents of data analysis and their ways to use, abuse, recylce, visualise and translate data. Fran Meissner provided an overview of recent types of visualization of migration data and discussed how these visualization practices highlight certain features of migration while veiling others. Her presentation gave an excellent example of the politics involved not only in data production and analysis but also in the various forms of later data usage. The link between data and politics was also central to the presentation of RALF FUTSELAAR (Amsterdam) who provided insights into the production of migration data in the Netherlands, with particular focus on the concept of *migratieachtergrond* (migration background). Having only been introduced in 2015, this concept is projected back into the past in statistical surveys, identifying the amount of people with such background at different points in time. Precisely because of this historical dimension of the „migration background", the concept obtains certain peculiar features, as it does not comprise, for instance, immigrants from former Dutch colonies like Indonesia or Suriname.

In the concluding discussion, some overarching topics of the workshop were identified. One recurrent point was the conclusion that on the one hand the technical potentialities of producing (big) data changed fundamentally throughout the twentieth and the early twenty-first century, while on the other hand the processes and principles of analyzing data have not changed significantly as yet. The underlying assumption was – and still is – that the more knowledge we have (on migration), the „better" we can manage and control the processes. This belief in the ascertainability of the world was as true for the card file indexes

– the „high tech" standard of producing and collecting data in the first half of the twentieth century – as it is for databases like Eurodac today.

A second point was the relevance of institutional frameworks and the influence of agents of data production that became obvious on several occasions. Institutions like the *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* in Stuttgart and the so-called 'experts' working at these think tanks very much shaped either the forthcoming processes of engineered migrations or the back projection (as in the case of the concept of *migratieachtergrond*) by developing the fundamental categories and producing data.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: Producing Data
Chair: Jannis Panagiotidis (Osnabrück)

Sebastian Bondzio (Osnabrück): Mining Historical Card File Indexes: Questions, Ideas and Examples

Ines Müller (Berlin): Data Mining in Zeiten der analogen Datensammlung: Das Deutsche Ausland-Institut und die Vision einer Einwohnermeldekartei der Auslandsdeutschen

Laura Stielike (Osnabrück): Producing Migration Knowledge: From Big Data to Evidence-Based Policy

Panel 2: Tracing Data Subjects
Chair: Laura Stielike (Osnabrück)

Vassilis Tsianos (Kiel): Identifizierung und Kontrolle der Migration am Beispiel der europäischen daktyloskopischen Datenbank Eurodac

Henning Borggräfe / Christian Höschler / Christiane Weber (all Bad Arolsen): Data on Displaced Persons. The International Tracing Service and its Journey from Actor to Archive

Panel 3: Translating Data
Chair: Laura Stielike (Osnabrück)

Jannis Panagiotidis (Osnabrück): Registration, Resettlement, Recognition: Shifting Uses of Data on Russian Germans since the 1930s

Fran Meissner (Delft): A Tale of Two Crises: How Big Data Analytics Translate Migration Emergencies Into Market Opportunity

Panel Discussion & Workshop 1: Agents of Data Production: Constructing the Self and the Other
Chair: Jannis Panagiotidis (Osnabrück)
Discussant: Christoph Rass (Osnabrück)

Input 1
Hans-Christian Petersen (Oldenburg): „A Life of Service to His People": Karl Stumpp and the Making of *Russlanddeutschtum*

Input 2
Simon Sperling (Osnabrück): „'Bleibeperspektive' – Constructing the Other"

Panel Discussion & Workshop 2: Agents of Data Analysis: Using, Abusing and Reusing Data
Chair: Laura Stielike (Osnabrück)
Discussant: Kerstin von Lingen (Heidelberg)

Input 1
Fran Meissner (Delft): Visual Perception: It Looks Pretty but Can You Read It? In Defense of Visual Literacy

Input 2
Ralf Futselaar (Amsterdam): Tracking Shifting Meanings in Civil Registrations

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