

## **Migrant Mother and Her Kin: Picturing Displacement in U.S. Visual Culture**

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From Jacob Riis' "Madonna of the Slums" via Lewis Hine's photographs of European immigrants on Ellis Island to the famous Depression-era photo portraits by Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans et al., images of migrant women with their children are among the most affectively powerful and politically influential visual representations in American history and thus inhabit a permanent place in American cultural memory. Also, on a global scale and in our immediate present, ongoing conflicts such as the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza have likewise produced impactful images of refugee women: Thus, Mohammed Salem's 2024 World Press Photo of the Year and *The New York Times*' much disputed July 25 front-page image, each showing a picture of a woman with a child, one dead, one starved and close to death, recently sent shock waves of horror around the world.

Taking Dorothea Lange's iconic *Migrant Mother* (1936) as a point of departure, this panel examines representations of displaced mothers and their families in U.S. visual culture as a site of negotiation – or contestation – of American core values and ideologies shaping public perceptions of migration, displacement, and identity. It explores how visual media depict migrant mothers and their kin as both symbols of resilience and victims of systemic injustices, in the process often humanizing, sentimentalizing, or politicizing their displacement. In this regard, Susan Sontag's critique of photography as a tool imbued with power imbalance (1977) seems as relevant as her defense of shocking photographs in her essay *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003).

We invite contributions on visual media including documentary and art photography, social media imagery, and film that place images of migrant or refugee mothers within discourses of immigration policy, race, gender, and class, and examine how these portrayals intersect with narratives of belonging, dislocation, and endurance. The core focus of this panel is to expose the complex relationships between visual culture, displacement, and the enduring struggle for recognition and justice in often deeply polarized sociopolitical contexts.

### **Confirmed speaker:**

Astrid Böger (Universität Hamburg): Exhibiting Migrant M/others: From *The Family of Man* (1955) to *Civilization: The Way We Live Now* (2018-)

Please send an abstract of 250-300 words as well as a brief biographical sketch to [karsten.fitz@uni-passau.de](mailto:karsten.fitz@uni-passau.de) and [nmschroeder@uni-koblenz.de](mailto:nmschroeder@uni-koblenz.de).