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U of L researcher part of team to study migration through the lens of refugee experience

***Remembering Refuge* will document the experiences of refugees who crossed the Canada-United States border as a way to increase public understanding of migration**

How have current stories of migration been shaped by longer histories of borders and displacement? What can the experiences of those crossing the Canada-U.S. border tell us about the history of Canada and the U.S.?

These are some of the questions driving a new project, *Remembering Refuge: Between Sanctuary and Solidarity*, that will build a digital oral history archive of the Canada-U.S. border as recounted by refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti.

The project, led by Dr. Julie Young, Grace Wu and Johanna Reynolds, is supported by a grant from the National Geographic Society and will be carried out in partnership with the Department of Geography at the University of Lethbridge. Young, Wu, and Reynolds have worked collaboratively on a number of projects over the last decade related to borders and migration. Young is also the Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Critical Border Studies and an assistant professor in the Department of Geography at the U of L.

“At a time when the public is inundated with a crisis narrative about migration and borders,” says Young, “the oral histories in *Remembering Refuge* remind us that it is urgent to step outside this story of ‘crisis’ and focus on the experiences of people who have been displaced multiple times, who now face being stranded by shifting policies between Canada and the US.”

The project team will carry out 20 oral history interviews with individuals who made refugee claims between the 1980s and 2018 and entered Canada through the Detroit (MI)-Windsor (ON) or Plattsburgh (NY)-Lacolle (QC) ports of entry. The sound recordings will be digitized and made publicly available on an open access, multimedia website, along with teaching modules designed for secondary and postsecondary educators and students.

Through oral history, educational modules, and digital storytelling, *Remembering Refuge* seeks to illuminate the experiences of those people who have crossed the Canada-US border—stories

that are not often told in-depth in public—and to foster critical thinking and engagement on how borders are constructed through politics, history, infrastructure, and our imaginations.

By focusing on the accounts of people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti, “whose movements are so often tied to the foreign policies of Canada and the US,” says Wu, “we want to engage with the public about the contexts that drive migration to and through North America.”

“Oral history is called ‘history from below,’ and it’s really effective for storytelling and education,” says Reynolds. “Our goal is to engage with communities about how it feels to encounter borders and how this might increase understandings of migration.”

“This project looks at how ‘unofficial’ archives reveal that communities have always contested borders and the ways they are enforced,” says Young, whose previous research has documented how border communities in the 1980s organized across the Canada-US border in solidarity with Central American refugees.

Oral history interviews will be carried out in the summer and fall of 2019 and the open access website, oral history archive, and teaching modules will be launched in early 2020. The team would like to speak with community members on either side of the border, who have themselves come through these routes, or who know of people who crossed the Canada-US border to seek refuge, especially from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti, and entered through the Detroit-Windsor or Plattsburgh-Lacolle ports of entry between 1980 and 2018. Please contact rememberingrefuge@gmail.com.

This news release can be found online at [Remembering Refuge](#).

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