

## Third Annual International Seminar in Historical Refugee Studies

Seminar held at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg-Essen, July 4–7, 2023. Co-organized by the University of Tübingen, the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI), and the American Historical Association (AHA), in cooperation with the Käthe Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21), University of Duisburg-Essen. Conveners: Jan C. Jansen (University of Tübingen), Dane Kennedy (George Washington University), Simone Lässig (German Historical Institute, GHI). Participants: Al-Khoder al-Khalifa (Jawaharlal Nehru University), Oladotun Awosusi (University of Fort Hare), Stephanie Bode (University of Augsburg), Grecia Chávez Medina (Centro de Estudios Históricos—El Colegio de México), Delphine Diaz (University of Reims), Ilana Feldman (George Washington University), Peter Gatrell (University of Manchester), Victoria Gonzalez Maltes (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris), Annika Heyen (University of Osnabrück), Jannik Keindorf (University of Tübingen), Martin-Oleksandr Kisly (National University of Kyiv—Mohyla Academy), Franziska Maria Lamp (University of Vienna), Michele Magri (École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris), Thomas Mareite (University of Tübingen), Alba Martínez (University of Leeds), Egemen Özbek (University of Duisburg-Essen), Sophie Rose (University of Tübingen), Rohail Salman (George Washington University), Phoebe Shambaugh (University of Manchester), Alessandra Vigo (University of Padova), Peter Walker (University of Wyoming).

The aim of the International Seminar in Historical Refugee Studies held in summer 2023 was to bring together a cohort of early-career scholars from different countries who

each work on the burgeoning field of refugee history from a variety of perspectives. The seminar underscored the importance of examining refugee experiences through a historical lens, with discussions ranging from the late seventeenth century to contemporary times. After words of welcome from conveners Jan Jansen and Dane Kennedy, the first session opened with a discussion of early modern perceptions of refugees in Europe and North America. Stephanie Bode's paper offered a comparative analysis of media representations of two seventeenth-century refugee movements in and out of France: English and Irish Catholics who followed King James II into exile in France during the 1680s and 1690s, and the Huguenot *réfugiés* who departed after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. These migrations were both understood in decidedly religious terms and strongly politicized, with competing narratives of virtuous refugee experiences being instrumentalized in wider debates on fiscal and religious policies. Peter Walker's contribution on American loyalist clergymen and their self-fashioning as refugee-martyrs following the American Revolution similarly highlighted the conjunction of religion and politics and stressed the emotional dimension of the discourse around compensation and support for loyalist refugees. Suffering, in this context, had moral valence in different ways for different institutions' humanitarian responses: whereas the Church of England mobilized an early modern mode of religious solidarity in its refugee relief collections, with co-religionists sympathizing with Anglican loyalists' plight, the operations of the American Loyalist Claims Commission, organized by the British government, were characterized by contrast by a politics of pity rather than sympathy.

The seminar's first day closed with a keynote lecture by Ilana Feldman, titled "Humanitarian Time and Refugee Presence: On Palestinian Lives in Extended Displacement." This public lecture explored both the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Palestinian refugee experience following the 1948 Nakba.

Feldman opened with the spatial evolution of several refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, demonstrating how an initial “humanitarian ordering” of emergency tents made way for increasingly dense, quasi-permanent housing enfolded in the space of the host societies. She then moved on to observations based on local fieldwork on the passing of time among Palestinian refugees, pointing to long periods of consistent destitution being repeatedly punctuated by moments of crisis. Humanitarian activity, meanwhile, has frequently centered on an attempt to structure time in the face of seemingly undifferentiated waiting. The lecture closed with a reflection on generational differences in approaches to time and on the relevance of time in refugee politics, with many Palestinians resisting the notion that the passing of time might resolve the conflict around their claims to a lost home.

The emphasis of the second session was on the United States’ and the United Kingdom’s responses to the European refugee crisis that resulted from the Second World War. Annika Heyen’s paper focused on the Bermuda Conference of 1943 and the Allied powers’ attempt to define the term “refugee” in the wake of Jewish citizens’ flight from Central and Eastern Europe. Her contribution showed how the term “refugee” was deliberately chosen over “Jews” to avoid fueling antisemitic sentiments in both nations. Under this definition, refugees were viewed as individuals who had crossed international borders and were outside their home country, limiting the pool of people addressed by the conference. Victoria Gonzalez Maltes focused on the Displaced Persons (DP) program in the United States, established shortly after World War II, which selected refugees for resettlement based on their ability and willingness to work, particularly as manual laborers. The program, while often seen as a humanitarian initiative, was fundamentally structured like a foreign worker recruitment scheme. The DP Act required refugees to secure a promise of employment, and agricultural quotas underscored the

focus on labor. Advocates emphasized refugees' work abilities, portraying them as productive workers. This labor-centric approach challenges the common perception of the DP program as purely a humanitarian endeavor.

In the third session, Franziska Maria Lamp explored postwar migration management, particularly focusing on displaced women in Austria. She delved into the gendered aspects of resettlement programs, emphasizing employers' preference for female workers as they received lower wages. Lamp highlighted individual cases of DPs who returned to Austria after initial resettlement attempts, shedding light on the bureaucratic challenges, health considerations, and family dynamics influencing their decisions. Gender's role in migration management was further explored by Alba Martínez, whose paper delved into the gender-based labeling of Spanish refugees in France between 1945 and 1978. She revealed that men were more likely to be considered "true" refugees due to their active anti-Francoist political and military roles, while women were often seen as "companions" to male refugees, relegating their experiences and political activities to the background. The administrative process to obtain refugee status thus reinforced traditional gender roles, perpetuating inequalities. "Unaccompanied" women faced suspicion and marginalization. Yet many of these women resisted these challenges, reclaiming their agency in the process.

The fourth session examined state responses to refugee crises outside Europe. Rohail Salman discussed Pakistan's response to the refugee crisis during its partition from India between 1947 and 1951, emphasizing the intertwined processes of state-making and nation-building. The bureaucratic exercises of rehabilitating refugees and managing evacuee property became key elements in defining Pakistan's national identity. The state's attempts to balance economic viability, administrative challenges, and ideological promises point to the complexities of early state-building.

A look at central state's control, inter-provincial coordination, and integration efforts underscores how refugee rehabilitation became a tool for national unity. Oladotun Awosusi analyzed the policy history of refugee containment in post-Apartheid South Africa. He noted the significant shift in South African refugee policy between 1998 and 2022 from inclusive practices to exclusionary measures. Initially, the country embraced progressive policies, welcoming refugees and granting asylum seekers rights to work and freedom of movement. However, subsequent amendments, influenced by nationalistic and exclusionary sentiments, have limited these rights, leading to the emergence of "hidden refugees." The government has increasingly employed tactics such as bureaucratic hurdles, detention centers, and border militarization to restrict entry and documentation of refugee status. Consequently, refugees have faced prolonged uncertainty, fear, and social tensions, while xenophobic attacks further exacerbated their predicament.

The fifth session explored diasporic community networks and solidarities over extended periods of time. Contributions by Al-Khoder al-Khalifa and Phoebe Shambaugh traced how dynamics of support and solidarity both within and across groups changed and shifted. Al-Khalifa discussed reflections through images, stories, and fictional narratives of the experiences of the Armenian refugee diaspora community in Syria from 1915 to 2011. He emphasized how trauma and displacement became historicized, but sometimes also silenced across generations. Shambaugh examined the case of Somali family reunification to Bolton (UK) in 1990 as it exemplified the development of an infrastructure of refugee relief relying on local communities and minority groups throughout the years of the UK Gateway resettlement scheme. In the process, Bolton developed a landscape of ethnic voluntary organizations responding to refugees and shaping the racial and religious politics of the town. Both papers explored the intersections

of displacement and agency, and highlighted how agency was limited by notions of state-building and recurring patterns of refugee reception and management. In Aleppo and Bolton, refugee communities sought to preserve their culture and language across generations while simultaneously having to live up to a public image of community usefulness.

Egemen Özbek gave a special presentation to start the third day of the seminar on the activities of the *Academy in Exile*, founded in 2017, a joint initiative of the University of Duisburg-Essen's Institute for Turkish Studies, the KWI (Essen), and the Forum Transregionale Studien (Berlin). The *Academy in Exile* supports scholars in the humanities, social sciences, arts, and law at risk of persecution on account of their academic work or commitment to academic freedom, human rights, and democracy. Özbek detailed the process by which the *Academy in Exile* offers fellowships to these scholars for them to safely pursue their intellectual and/or artistic production, as well as some of the challenges involved in selecting and effectively supporting awardees.

The sixth and penultimate session explored exile politics in the Americas during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Michele Magri discussed the experiences of Italian exiles in the United States during the antebellum period, with a focus on New York and New Orleans. Magri's contribution stressed the social and political diversity of these exiles (from Bonapartist veterans to pro-Risorgimento liberals) while analyzing the range of solidarity networks and political practices that united them. It examined the exiles' role in forming notions of Italian national identity as well as their influence over political debates in the United States. Grecia Chávez Medina explored the history of Mexico City as a transnational hub of radical left-wing exile during the 1920s and 1930s. Her contribution analyzed how Communist exiles were welcomed into—and actively contributed to—structures of political solidarity in the Mexican capital, with a focus on International

Red Aid (IRA), a Comintern-affiliated organization. Chávez Medina's paper thus revealed how the IRA's assistance to Communist refugees in Mexico City was part of a larger effort to forge a Communist International.

The seventh and last session of the conference explored returns from exile and the complexities of belonging in (post-)colonial contexts. Martin-Oleksandr Kisly presented on how Crimean Tatars articulated their cultural identity around memories of the homeland and narratives about their return—both real and imagined—to Crimea. His contribution shed light on Tatars' experiences of Soviet displacement, examining contests over the meaning of "homeland" among them. Kisly finally stressed the gap between romanticized narratives on Crimea among Tatar exiles and the practical reality of return. Alessandra Vigo discussed the return of Italian colonists from Africa in decolonizing Italy in relation to notions of Italianness (*Italianness*). Vigo's contribution emphasized the returnees' struggles when seeking to assert peninsular belonging. As many among them did not share identity features considered cornerstones of Italian identity, Vigo showed that returnees often faced derogatory stereotypes and cultural exclusion from fellow Italians treating them as strangers in their own homeland.

The conversations stemming from this seminar, encompassing multiple regions and centuries, have generated numerous inquiries for the field of refugee history. These questions can be distilled, albeit not exhaustively, into three primary themes. Firstly, several presentations underscored the significance of emotional regimes in exploring refugee experiences over time, particularly focusing on how trauma and displacement are remembered or suppressed. They highlighted the cultural and political foundations shaping both personal and public (self-)portrayals of refugees, along with the recollections of homelands and narratives surrounding the idea of return, from the early modern era forward.

Secondly, discussions delved into the temporal dimensions of refugee experiences. Temporality emerges as a crucial dimension influencing various aspects of refugees' lives and political dynamics in exile, shaping notions of belonging and the prospects of returning home, among other elements. Analyzing the interplay between time and refuge unveils essential facets of refugee experiences, including disparities across generations, solidarity between refugees and non-refugees, and the enduring resilience of refugee diasporic communities. Lastly, the contributions underscored the significance of categorization. Many presentations elucidated the intricate intersections between refugee migration management and broader state- or nation-building projects. They revealed how determinations of refugee status and resettlement programs intertwined with expressions of state sovereignty, often resulting in differential treatment based on factors like class, race, gender, and subjective assessments of "usefulness" as laborers or settlers. The fourth International Seminar in Historical Refugee Studies, scheduled for July 2024 in Tübingen, will further explore these diverse questions shaping the landscape of historical research on refugee history.

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